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# THE CONDOR

ERNEST F. MANCHESTER

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Through the Victory Book Campaign  
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# The Condor

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# **THE CONDOR**





# THE CONDOR

## CHAPTER I.

As I sat on the wide porch of the roomy bungalow and gazed dreamily across the placid surface of the little lake which so truthfully reflected the green beauty of the wooded hills beyond, it seemed to me that I was the most comfortable person in the world.

To be sure, the bungalow was not mine, nor did I own the gleaming lake or the wooded hills, but they were mine to enjoy in my own way, for I was the welcome guest of a host who allowed me to amuse myself as I would.

For the last four years I had led a strenuous life in the far Southwest as assistant engineer on a hard proposition in the way of building a railroad through as bad a bit of country as I ever expect to encounter from a professional standpoint. It was

done, at last, and as I had taken a slight touch of the fever I came north to get it out of my blood and to enjoy the first vacation I had seen in five years.

The best friend I had in the North at this time was a classmate, who was a man of about my own age by the name of Samuel Murray. He had taken up electrical engineering and had become one of the most expert men I have ever seen in that line. He had done very well at the business, too, although he was far from being a wealthy man. He received large sums of money for his services in the course of a year, but he never seemed to be able to save much of it except what he invested in real estate, of which he owned considerable, and among the rest was the bungalow.

He also owned the land composing the shores of the lake, thereby controlling the fishing rights in that beautiful little sheet of water. He had not been with me for the greater part of the time I had spent here, but for the last three days his cheerful company had been mine, and as I lit my after-luncheon cigar he joined me on the porch.

"Well, Jack," said he, as he dropped into one of the comfortable lounging chairs and

began filling his pipe, "you are appearing in some better health than when you first came to this neck of the woods."

"I am feeling better. In fact, I am feeling so well that you will not be able to keep me much longer unless you give me something to do."

"Why? Are you afraid of getting lazy?"

"Hardly that, but there is nothing very interesting, to a man like me, in holding down a chair, no matter how comfortable that chair happens to be."

"Well, perhaps not, but don't get impatient. Any man who takes a vacation only once in five years ought to be willing to make that a good one."

"You may be right, and, for a fact, I have no intention of bringing mine to an end just now."

"Good. I am glad to find you so sensible."

"Thank you, and now to change the subject, what do you call that thing out there on the lake?" I asked, pointing to what, at this distance, had the appearance of a water-bug lifting long feelers at each side, although I, of course, knew it to be a boat coming directly towards us.

"That is a boat," he replied, with a

chuckle. "What did you suppose it was, a man-o'-war?"

"Hardly, but I understood you allowed none but your boats on the lake, and that isn't one of your boats, is it?"

"Well, there are no boats allowed here except mine as a rule, but that one out there is an exception. It belongs to a young man by the name of Frank Byrd, and as he had the boat on the lake when I bought the property, and, besides that, as he seemed to be a decent kind of a boy, I gave him leave to boat and fish any time he cared to, and I'm glad I did, for he has never abused the privilege."

"Live near here?"

"He lives with his parents and they own a small farm something like a mile and a half from the other side of the lake."

"Is the boy an only child?"

"Yes, but he is hardly what you would call a boy, as I believe he is twenty-four or twenty-five years old, although he does not look it."

"I suppose he works on the farm with his father and will go on with it after the old folks are gone. Is he married?"

"No, and you haven't exactly hit the case

either. I understand he does but very little work on the land. I have heard the people about here talk and none of them have much good to say of him. According to what they say he is a lazy loafer, who will do nothing to help his father, and that his only ambition is to 'putter,' as they express it."

"I thought you said he was a decent kind of a chap."

"I did. The trouble is with the natives. They don't understand what they are talking about. Frank works more on that farm now than his father wishes him to."

"What is the idea?" I asked, as I watched the boat with its lone oarsman draw near.

"Well, for one thing, the old man believes in education, so they sent the boy away to school, but he only stayed a year or so, as he said they taught too many things there and he wanted to specialize. He brought back a good many books with him, and I guess the most of them deal with only one subject. His father fixed over an old hop-house for a workshop, or laboratory, and here the boy spends the most of his time, and has for the last five years."

"What is his specialty—inventing?"

"I don't know as to that, for he is not in the habit of talking much about what he does, but I have an idea that it has something to do with chemistry."

Young Byrd moored his boat at the floating wharf and came towards the bungalow at a rapid walk. Murray met him at the foot of the steps, shook his hand warmly, and, after introducing us, seated the young chemist between us. He was a clean-appearing chap, rather small, but compactly built, and although his face was somewhat thin he yet gave me the impression of being in the most perfect health. His eyes were dark gray, brilliant and keen in expression. He had a strong jaw, a thin-lipped but firm mouth, and while his eyebrows and lashes were nearly or quite black his hair was light brown, rather thin and usually rumped.

For perhaps thirty minutes we chatted of things which have no bearing on this story, but I soon made up my mind that Byrd had come here with a purpose in view far different than a social visit, and so was not surprised when he so informed Murray. I started to leave them, but Murray called me back, and turning to Byrd asked him if the business he wished to speak of was of a private nature.

"Why, no, I guess not, although I should rather it did not go beyond you and Mr. Carlton just at this time," he replied.

"Whatever you have to say," replied Murray, "will be just as safe with Mr. Carlton as with myself, so go ahead and state your case. You are among friends."

"Thank you, Mr. Murray, I was sure of that or I shouldn't have come here in the first place. I shall try to be as brief as I can. You are probably aware that I have spent a good share of my time for the last four or five years in the shop which my father built for me from an old hop-house. If you have listened to any of the talk which the people about here hand out you must have heard of it, for I guess they have discussed me and my loafing habits, as they word it, not a little, but this has been the least of my troubles.

"I realize that I have used up a good deal of time and not a small sum of money, but it hasn't been for my amusement, nor in vain, I believe. I have now something to show for it, but I am not ready to put what I have discovered before the world, as it is yet incomplete. I shouldn't even be here giving you this line of talk if it wasn't for the fact



that I have come to where it is necessary for someone, besides myself, to know what I am doing, for I am at the end of my capital."

"Do you come to me with the expectation of finding a capitalist?" asked Murray, with a smile.

"I have come to you," replied Byrd, "because I have faith in your honor and judgment. I thought that if you did not have the funds to go on with me in this thing that you still might know of someone who would advance what I need."

"How much capital are you looking for?"

"Not a very large amount. I think that ten or fifteen thousand dollars should be ample."

"Well, if that is all you need, and if you can convince us that you have something which will warrant the venture, I think the money could be raised without going outside of present company. I have a few thousands that I could spare and I guess that Jack," laying his hand on my shoulder, "would come in. How does that strike you, old man?"

"Let us hear what the discovery is first," said I. "After that, if we like the appearance of things, we will talk about the money."

"I should hardly expect you to advance anything unless you did know what I have done and what I expect to accomplish," said Byrd.

"Well, we are all attention," said Murray, "speak your piece."

"Long before I went away to attend school," began Byrd, "I had very definite ideas as to what I wished to do, but from the first I realized that I could never go very far with it unless I had a metal much different than any yet known to the world. For this reason I at once took up chemistry and for five long years used up gray matter through grinding study and more or less dangerous experiments along lines which, I believe, have been considered perfectly useless by the greater minds of this as well as foreign countries. I have had many disappointments, but at last I have succeeded in discovering how to make a metal which I believe will enable mankind to accomplish more, in certain lines, than has been dreamed of since the world began."

"What do you call this metal?" asked Murray.

"I have not named it as yet, so I cannot tell you, but I can do better, I can show you

a sample," and he took a piece of stuff from his pocket nearly three inches in diameter the larger way and about an inch thick. From its shape I judged it had been formed by pouring the metal, while in liquid state, upon a flat surface.

As I sat the nearest to him Byrd passed the thing to me, and as he dropped it into my open hand I came very near throwing it over my head. I suppose that my muscles had braced themselves to a certain extent so as to sustain a small weight, and as the object struck my palm my hand flew upwards because there was no weight to sustain. If I closed my eyes I could hardly say whether there was anything resting upon my open palm or not.

The stuff was dull gray in color with a blue sheen, which seemed to disappear in strong lights and become more pronounced in the shadow of my hand, so that it had the appearance of being bluer in some places than in others, but this was not true, for the color followed the shadow.

After a short examination I passed it on to Murray, who seemed to be as greatly surprised at the lack of weight as I had been. He studied it for some time without com-

ment, but at last looked across to Byrd and asked:

"For what purposes do you think this metal suitable?"

"For very many," replied Byrd.

"It is remarkably light, but is it strong enough to be of much use?"

"It is quite strong enough for any purpose, but you may have more faith in that statement after you have tested the strength of this small piece," and he passed Murray a piece of the metal which was no thicker than a toothpick.

"Shall I break it?" asked Murray.

"If you can."

He did his best, but he could not even bend it, and when he passed it to me I found that I could do no better, although I have strong hands.

"It is far stronger than steel," said Byrd, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Is it malleable?"

"More so than pure brass. It can be bent into any shape without danger of breaking, but it stays bent. There is no spring to it, and it cannot be tempered."

"Will it rust or corrode?" asked Murray.

"No, sir, and most kinds of acids will not

affect it at all, but it could not be used for electric wire or anything of that nature, as it is non-conductive."

"Is it expensive?"

"Rather so, but still the cost of production is not at all prohibitive."

"You said something," said I, "about having a use for a metal of this nature. What was your idea when you first started to produce what you seem to have accomplished? In other words, for what purpose did you make the metal?"

"I intend to build an airship."

"I thought so."

"Why, of course," said Murray. "What have I been thinking of? This is an ideal metal for anything of that kind."

"Were you thinking of constructing a heavier-than-air machine or is it to be a dirigible?"

"A dirigible in every sense of the word."

"Do you expect to use this metal for a gas-bag?" asked Murray.

"Yes, the whole machine will be made of it."

"But, my dear sir, you are proposing an impossibility. There is no known gas that would lift such a machine one inch from the

ground, although I will admit that your metal is far lighter than aluminum."

"It is more than six times lighter," replied Byrd, "but I don't expect to be able to construct a machine which could be raised from the ground by the lifting power of anything like hydrogen gas."

"What do you expect to use?"

"A gas of my own discovery. Hydrogen gas has a levity of something like fourteen times less than atmospheric air, but I have discovered how to produce a gas which is nearly as much lighter than hydrogen gas as that is lighter than air."

"If that is a fact," said Murray, "then you have made a wonderful discovery, but will you please explain to us how you expect to construct your ship and fly it when it is completed?"

"Well, my idea is to construct a tube of from forty to sixty feet in length and about nine or ten feet in diameter. It will be divided into a number of compartments, and all of it, as well as the rest of the ship, made of this metal. The different compartments of the tube would contain the necessary amount of the new gas to lift the ship to whatever height you wished to attain.

By a system of valves it would be possible to have as much or as little gas as was desired, for the gas will be generated in the machine.

"Below the tube, and of the same size as that part of the ship, so far as length and breadth are concerned, and connected to it the entire distance about the tube at its greatest part, as you would draw a band about an egg from end to end, will be the car, which can be divided into rooms as most suitable.

"The forward compartments of this car would naturally be the pilot or conning room, and here would be all the machinery of control. The after compartment would be the engine-room and here would be the different power plants, such as the generator for making the gas, the engine and a dynamo for generating electricity for lighting and heating purposes. The rest of the space would be used for living and sleeping rooms."

"Anyone would suppose that you were talking about building a summer hotel instead of a flying-machine," said Murray. "Do you believe all you say?"

"I most certainly do," replied Byrd, "and

if you will only come to my workshop I will agree to make you believe far more than you do now."

"I think," said I, "that that will be the best way. I, for one, should like to see whatever you can put before us in the way of proof."

"That will be the best arrangement," said Murray, "and you may expect us at about eight o'clock tomorrow morning, that is if the launch doesn't balk with us before we reach the other shore."

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To the Armed Forces and Merchant Marine**



## CHAPTER II.

The first thing Byrd showed us the next morning when we arrived at his small but complete laboratory was a mass of the new metal which, if it had been composed of iron would have weighed nearly one hundred pounds, although its actual weight was so nearly nothing as to be astonishing. He also showed us a sheet of the metal which he had hammered until it was no thicker than cardboard and which would float in the air almost as well as the thinnest of tissue paper.

"Have you thought of a name for this metal?" asked Murray.

"Not yet, and I must admit that I have given that part of it very little thought," replied Byrd.

"We must have a name for it, however. Why not call it Byrd metal?"

"I hardly think I like that as a name," replied the inventor.

"Why not coin a word?" I asked. "Take the four words, royal, air, ship, metal, and use the first letter of each, which gives us the word, rasm."

"Rasm," said Murray. "Well, it has one advantage, it's short."

"It suits me all right," said Byrd.

"If you are satisfied, we ought to be," said Murray, "so let it go at that."

"Very well, but now I want to show you what I believe to be as great an invention as rasm is."

"And by that I suppose you mean your new gas?" asked Murray.

"Yes, that is what I mean. Now, although I can make the gas in unlimited quantities, the thing is yet incomplete, because I do not know its power. It is strange stuff, I know that, for it is compressible as is air and steam and still heat or cold have no effect upon it. There are a good many ingredients which go into the composing of it, but in the state which it finally assumes when ready for use there are but two parts, either of which, if kept separately, will retain its strength indefinitely, but if they are once mixed or placed close together they will instantly begin throwing off gas."

"I suppose," said Murray, "that in doing this these ingredients become rapidly exhausted."

It is true that they become exhausted, but that transition is far from being rapid."

"Have you any of this gas-producing material on hand?"

"Yes, and if you will step this way I will show it to you and also how it works.

From one of a set of drawers built into the side of the room he took an object that was about the size and shape of a brick. It was firmly packed together, but not so much so but that a blow from a hammer would cause it to fall into pieces, and these could be ground between your fingers and reduced to crystal-like particles as fine as the salt used by the manufacturers of ice-cream. It was of a deep, rich green.

Byrd broke from the brick a piece no larger than a thimble and placed it on his work-table. He then went to the other side of the room and from a cupboard took a glass jar which was about one-third full of a powder composed of grains as fine as the finest sand. This powder was of the most brilliant scarlet I believe I ever saw. Of this he took as much as would lay on the end of his knife-blade and placed it close against the green substance from the brick. He did not attempt to mix them in any way.

In a few moments the colors began to change from scarlet and green to a deep purple, but there were wavering lines of red, blue and yellow, which faded and glowed in much the same manner as phosphorus when rubbed upon a moist surface. It was weird-appearing stuff.

"Has it begun making gas?" asked Murray.

"Yes."

"Is it scentless? Are we breathing it now?"

"No, it has an odor, but you will not breathe it unless you hold your face directly above it, and if you did it would do no harm, as it is not poisonous."

Each of us held his face over the strange-appearing stuff for a moment, and from here the odor was plainly evident. I cannot say that the smell of it was either sweet or sour, but for some reason it gave one the impression of being both.

"Why is it," asked Murray, "that we don't smell the gas unless we have our faces directly over the fireworks?"

"Because the gas is so much lighter than air it rises straight to the ceiling and escapes through the cracks between the

boards. Another thing, you spoke of the fireworks, but as a matter of fact there is no true fire about it and no heat. There is not even danger from fire, as neither the ingredients nor the gas are inflammable. Let me show you."

He lit a match and held the burning wood over the glowing colors, but the only effect this had was to cause the flame to flutter and stream upwards until it was blown out by the swiftly rising gas. He then took a common paper bag of the five-pound size, and, opening it to its fullest extent, placed it, bottom upwards, directly over the strange mixture. In less than thirty seconds the bag rose slowly to the ceiling, where it tipped over and fell to the floor. He repeated this experiment again and again, but the bag never failed of rising to the ceiling within thirty seconds.

"How long will it take to exhaust so small a quantity as we have here?" I asked.

"Very nearly an hour."

"So long as that?"

"Yes, it works very slowly compared with the large amount of gas thrown off."

"A large balloon could be filled with a few pounds of it at that rate," said Murray.

"A large balloon could be filled with much less than a few pounds of the ingredients," said Byrd, "and a balloon with this gas would never come down unless the bag leaked or the operator opened a valve."

"Why?"

"Because this gas is not affected by heat or cold and so would not expand or shrink from changes in the atmosphere. But there is one thing about it that I don't understand. I know that it has force, but I don't know how much. What I mean by that is this: If you put some of this stuff into an air-tight receptacle it will form gas enough to burst it, and until it does burst the upward lift seems to grow stronger. I will show you just what I mean."

He pulled a tin can from under the table and unscrewed the cap. It was a common gallon can such as farmers use to store maple syrup. He put into this can a piece of the green brick as large as a walnut and a very little of the scarlet powder.

"Now," said he, "I shall carry this can out into the field, and I want to time it from the moment I put on the cap so as to ascertain how long it will require to get a lifting power strong enough to raise the can from the ground."

"It will never lift that can," said Murray, with conviction.

"Wait and see," replied Byrd.

He carried the charged can four or five rods from the laboratory, screwed on the cap and placed it on the ground. I noticed that he did not remain near it, but returned quickly to where we stood. In a few moments the tin began snapping as the dents were forced out by the imprisoned gas, and at the end of one minute and eighteen seconds, by Murray's watch, it rose slowly into the air, but by the time it had attained a height of fifteen feet it began ascending much faster until it reached an altitude of perhaps one hundred feet, when it burst with a report like the explosion of a gun and fell to the ground with one end blown out.

"You see how it works," said Byrd. "That can did not burst under a pressure of less than four or five pounds to the inch and yet it blew the end out rather suddenly."

"Two minutes and six seconds," said Murray.

"Well, after all, that only proves that the power is greater than a tin can is able to bear, but the question is, how much greater?

There is no use in going any further with the plans of an airship until we know how much power the gas will develop," said Byrd.

"How do you propose to do that?" I asked.

"We must have a cylinder of small capacity, at least it does not need to be large, and strong enough to bear safely a pressure of 1,000 pounds to the square inch. with such a cylinder as that, with the necessary cocks, safety-valve, and pressure gauge, I believe we should be able to learn just how powerful the gas is."

"Of course we can, for I don't believe it has a greater power than that," said Murray, "and I will see that you get your cylinder, as I have a very good friend who owns one of the best equipped rolling-mills there is in the State. There is nothing he can't do with any kind of metal."

"But all this will take money," said Byrd, "and I'm broke."

"We will find the money," said Murray, "don't worry about that."

"You have made me the happiest man in the world," said Frank, grasping each of us by the hand.



## CHAPTER III.

Because we wished to make a thorough test of the new metal enough of it was produced within the next ten days for our purpose, which Murray carried away to the rolling-mill and brought back formed into a cylinder which had been subjected to a cold-water test of 1,200 pounds to the inch.

It was equipped with a safety-valve and a pressure gauge which would register as high as 1,000 pounds. Enough of the gas-producing ingredients was put into this cylinder to fill it with gas many times over, so as to allow it to reach its full power, whatever that proved to be.

Murray timed the process, and at the end of one minute from the time the cylinder was closed the indicator-hand on the gauge showed a pressure of only a few ounces, but at the end of five minutes the pressure was 110 and at eight minutes 240, while at the end of 12 minutes we had a pressure of 400 pounds and it was still getting larger.

"Where do you suppose that thing is going to stop?" asked Murray.

"I don't know," replied Frank, with concern.

"Fifteen minutes," said Murray. "What does it read now?"

"Four hundred and sixty."

"Do you think this gas has a power great enough to drive the propeller of an air-ship?" asked Frank, with a faint smile.

"Either that or tear it off," replied Murray. "Twenty minutes, what does she say now?"

"Five hundred and twenty and still going," I replied with a glance at the door, for I will admit that I was getting more than nervous.

The hand still kept slowly climbing until at the end of thirty minutes it stood at 560 pounds to the square inch, and at the end of one hour it was still at that point.

"Is that the limit of the power?" asked Murray.

"It must be, unless the ingredients have become exhausted, and I cannot believe that," said Frank.

"There is a way to find out which it is," said I. "All that will be necessary is to open the vent-cock and allow the pressure to fall a few pounds and then see if it will go back to 560 when it is closed."

"We will try it," said Frank, and he opened the valve.

In an instant the gas began escaping with a shrill hiss that was little less than a scream, while dust, papers and everything else of light weight flew about the room. We opened the door and windows, but even then the gas was rather overpowering, unless we held our heads near the floor.

It took nearly one-half hour for the pressure to fall to 550, but within a few minutes after the cock was closed it went back to 560 and remained there. We tested it in this manner a number of times, but as there was never any difference we concluded that a pressure of 560 pounds was the limit at which the ingredients were able to throw off gas, the pressure at this point becoming so great that the process was held in check as long as it remained in that condition.

We allowed the cylinder to remain under this strain for three days, in which time there was no change in the gauge. Then we again reduced the pressure, but it would always return to 560 shortly after the cock was closed, and it was astonishing to know how much power was developed from the

small amount of ingredients the cylinder contained at the start.

"I am satisfied," said Murray at the end of the tests, "and I'm ready to invest my money in an airship to be built by the three of us. What do you say, Jack?" turning to me.

"I am with you," I replied, "provided we can raise money enough."

"It will not take a very large sum," said Frank, "because we can do a good part of the work ourselves."

The first thing necessary to do was to get enough of the metal we had named rasm to make such a machine as we planned. This could have been done faster by taking the ingredients to a large smelting plant, but there was always the danger of the process being learned, so we made it in the furnace which Byrd had already erected.

When enough of this had been produced for our purpose it was shipped to the plant where the cylinder had been made and both Frank and Murray went with it while I stayed at the farm and, with a gang of men, put up a building adjacent to the laboratory in which to assemble the airship when the material was ready, and although that part

of the work was put through with a rush it was nearly three months before everything was in the new building ready for us to get to work upon.

The big gas-tube had been completed at the mill, and, although it was so light, it was an awkward thing to handle on account of its size. It was forty-five feet long and nine feet in diameter its entire length, except at the ends, which were bluntly rounded. It was divided into five compartments, each complete in itself.

This tube had been tested to stand a pressure of fifteen pounds to the square inch, while each compartment was furnished with a safety-valve which allowed a pressure of only eight pounds. There was also the necessary pipe connections for inlet and outlet valves and the pressure gauges.

This work had all been done at the mill, besides which the pipes, valves, engine, propeller, dynamo and all other machinery, as well as the plates, of which the car was formed, were made and shaped there ready for assembling, which was our principal task.

The whole ship, when completed, was forty-five feet long, nine feet wide and six-

teen feet high. The ends were a true half-circle as was the top, as this consisted of the upper half of the tube, but the sides as well as the bottom were flat.

Like the ark this strange craft had but one door, which, unlike that of the ark, opened in instead of out, but in the matter of windows, while Noah seemed to be satisfied with one for three floors we, who perhaps had more advanced ideas about ventilation, had twelve for one floor.

The ship was divided into three principal rooms, and the door, which was about twelve feet from the front end, or prow, opened into the living room, which extended the entire width of the ship and twenty-seven feet of its length. All that part of the ship abaft the living-room, except a small toilet, was in one compartment, and here were the engine, power-tank, dynamo and the other machinery for working the craft. There was also a sink with running water on tap. This may sound strange, but as a matter-of-fact it was simple, as the water was stored in tanks under the lower sleeping berths and forced from there to the sink by a small air-pump run by electricity.

The pilot room, which consisted of the

eight feet of space in the extreme bow, was the most interesting part of the whole craft. It was lighted by three windows, one of which consisted of a large sheet of glass curved to conform with the bend of the prow, or a true half-circle, and allowed the helmsman an unobstructed view ahead and at each side. Near this window was the wheel, with a seat for the helmsman, while in the bow there was a powerful search-light, so hung by a ball and socket joint that it could be turned to throw the light in nearly every direction.

At the right hand of the wheel was a switchboard with levers and push buttons, so arranged that the man at the wheel could control everything about the management of the ship. On the wall, where they were at all times visible, were six pressure gauges, five for the different compartments of the gas-tube and one for the power-tank. There were also in this room wet and dry bulb thermometers, hydrometers, recording barometer, an aneroid and a staiscope. There was also a binnacle with a mariner's compass and card.

One of the most ingenious devices about the whole craft was a small and really sim-

ple contrivance, which Frank designated as the equalizer. It consisted of a thin sheet of rasm eighteen inches in length and five inches in width. It was in the form of a trough of the right size to contain a ball three inches in diameter. It was slightly concaved from end to end, so that a ball placed in the groove would remain in the center so long as the ends were level with each other. At a point six inches from the center each way there was a light steel spring with a steel pin beneath it, but not touching it by a quarter of an inch, while the spring was in its normal position. In the groove, between the springs and under a guard, was a steel ball three inches in diameter.

The whole device was fastened to the wall in the engine-room in a horizontal position and level with the ship as it stood upon the floor. Then the necessary electrical connections were made with it. So long as the ship remained upon a level keel fore and aft the ball would lie at the lowest point in the groove and away from the springs, but if one end became higher than the other then the ball would roll against the spring at the lower end, force it against



the steel pin, thereby closing the circuit, which would cause two valves to open, one allowing gas to flow into the end compartment of the gas-tube which was the lowest and the other allowing gas to escape from the opposite or highest end. This process, as must be plainly seen, would certainly keep the craft upon a level keel fore and aft.

As far as a sideways roll was concerned, we did not believe it would amount to enough to cause discomfort and certainly not danger, as the ship was so deep compared with its width and, moreover, the center of gravity was so low in the hull that the swing could not be much under any circumstances.

At last, after over five months of constant toil, we had the ship so nearly completed that we decided to give it a trial. We had no intention, however, of flying the craft, or attempting to, by daylight, as we had maintained the most rigid secrecy in regard to the whole affair. With the exception of Frank's father and mother there was no one who knew what we were trying to accomplish.

Of course, the people of the rolling mill

know that we were trying to do something out of the ordinary, but they knew nothing for certain, and as for the wonderful gas, it had never been mentioned in their hearing.

The day upon which we decided to give the ship a trial we had an early supper, and immediately after Frank charged all three of the feed chambers by which the power-tank, or cylinder, was supplied with gas, but allowed the gas to enter the cylinder from only one. This cylinder had been tested to stand a strain of 1,000 pounds to the square inch, while the safety-valve was set to open at a pressure of 600 pounds. This eliminated all danger of an explosion.

At the end of thirty minutes Frank, who had been watching the gauge, reported the pressure to be at its height and Murray asked him what came next in the order.

"One of you go to the engine-room and watch the machinery while I start the power, but I guess the other had better stay out here and keep an eye on the propeller," he replied.

Murray went to the engine-room; Frank entered the pilot-house, while I remained outside within sight of the propeller. This

was of the two-bladed pattern with blades five feet long and much wider than those used on aeroplanes. Within a few minutes after Frank entered the pilot-room the propeller began revolving slowly, and although he had turned on but a very small part of the power, yet it soon became, to the eye, little more than a blueish blur. If there had been gas in the lifting-tube I believe the ship would have forced its way through the great doors at the end of the hangar.

After running the engine for some time at low speed Frank shut it off and then started the dynamo, running it until the storage batteries were charged, which would give us electricity for all lights except the searchlight, for six hours, at least. We were now ready for the trial flight.

## CHAPTER V.

The night was perfect for our purpose, as there was not a breath of air stirring, while the sky was as clear as a bell and the world flooded by the mellow light of the newly risen moon. At a little after nine o'clock in the evening we threw open the great doors and Frank took his place at the wheel in the helmsman's seat. Murray, Frank's father, and I were standing at different points by the side of the ship ready to steady it when it should become light enough to rise from the ground; that is to say, if it ever did.

"Are you ready?" asked Frank from the open window.

"All ready here," was the reply.

He threw the switch which allowed the gas to flow into all of the compartments of the great tube while we waited in a state of nervous suspense, but not for long, as within three minutes the ship slowly and softly rose from the floor.

We quickly sang out, but Frank had already closed the valves so that the ship had only bouyancy enough to make it practical-

ly without weight, yet not so light as to rise completely from the ground. It was like a huge soap-bubble as it slowly swayed and softly moved about at a touch, for the least effort was all that was necessary to affect it.

"Can you handle her?" asked Frank.

"Easily."

"Then out with her."

We half pushed, half carried the huge craft out into the moonlight and away from the building, where we allowed it to come to an uneasy rest upon the grass-land, when Frank told us to get aboard.

Frank's father, who had helped us to get the craft to where it was, now stood back some few feet from the door gazing up with half-delighted awe at the huge bulk, which he knew to be so light that he alone could raise it clear from the ground with one hand; and I believe that if it had not been for Mrs. Byrd, who stood by his side, he would have come with us when Frank told us to get aboard, but she locked her arm in his, saying:

"No; I will not lose both husband and son at the same time."

"There is no danger of your losing

either," said Frank. "This thing is as safe as a house."

"Perhaps it is as long as it is where a house should be," she replied, "but I should not feel remarkably safe in a house that was floating around hundreds of feet above the good green earth."

Frank made no reply to this except to chuckle, and as Murray was already inside I followed him and closed the door behind me.

"We are ready when you are," said I, as I entered the pilot-room.

It was rather dark here, as the only lights turned on were those which lighted the dials of the gauges and the compass. It was the gauges to which I turned first, as I wished to know how much pressure it had been necessary to develop in the tube to attain the bouyancy we now had, but none of them registered any pressure, except that of the power cylinder, which stood at 560, as usual. I should have known that there could have been no pressure on any of the compartment gauges, as there were air-cocks in the bottom of the tube to allow the air, displaced by the gas, to escape, and these were open.

I saw Frank throw a switch as I went to the window and spoke to his parents, but I hardly think that I realized what it meant until they, the ground beneath them, and the buildings looming so plainly in the moonlight, suddenly sank below me. I say suddenly, although we did not rise at all swiftly. Instead, the ascent was rather slow, but it was so steady and even and, above all, so silent that I had no sensation or rising. It was as though the earth was falling from under us.

When we first left the ground the ship was not upon an even keel, as the stern seemed to rise first, but by the time we had attained a height of fifty feet there was no perceptible difference, and after we ascended something like 100 or 150 feet our upward course was slight, if any, as Frank closed the valves as soon as we had fairly left the ground and had not opened them again.

Up here there seemed to be a slight current of air from the northwest, as we soon began drifting to the south and east, but Frank now threw the slow speed switch and in a moment the ship began moving ahead.

"Now," said Frank, "we will see if she will steer."

The ship was lying with her bow to the west, or very nearly so, as he spoke, but as he turned the wheel to the right she swung around in a clean curve, passed almost directly above the buildings, and then away into the north, where he held her for ten or fifteen minutes, when he turned a complete circle and again passed above the field back of the laboratory, where we could see Frank's parents wildly waving their hands as we swept on into the south.

"She steers as true as a liner," said Frank in a tone of elation.

"That's plainly seen," said Murray, "but has she got any speed?"

"I don't know, but we'll soon find out," replied Frank, as he threw the lever to half speed.

In a very few minutes our rate of progress had more than trebled, while we, for the first time, heard the soft hum of the propeller and the low speed-song of the turbine engine.

"How fast are we traveling?" asked Murray, as he gazed down upon the moonlit panorama of fields and woods, farm build-



ings and zigzag fences, which steadily and silently swept beneath us.

"That is a hard matter to say," I replied, "as we have had no experience of the kind before."

"What a view we get even by moonlight!" he exclaimed, and pointing from the port window: "Have you noticed the effect of the light on our little lake? It looks like a splash of silver against the darkness of the woods," and indeed it did.

"Where are you taking us?" I asked of Frank, as I at last turned from the wonderful view.

"Anywhere you say, but I thought we would fly over the little village of Leeds, and from there to the small town of Vernon. The distance between those villages is about as nearly nine miles as it can be, but, as the crow flies, which it happens is our way of traveling, it is probably not over eight. My idea was to time the ship over those eight miles, running at half speed going, and full speed coming back."

"It is a good idea, but I think we had better get a little higher up, if we can, before we fly over many villages, as undoubtedly the inhabitants are not all in bed at this

hour, and, you know, the less they see of us the less bother they will make us through curiosity."

"That is true; we will go higher right now."

He threw the gas switch, but kept it open for only a short time, as we quickly rose to what we judged to be at least one thousand feet above the valley, and at this height we did not believe we should be noticed, although we intended to use our lights.

Having the lights turned on was my idea, as I wished to see how the equalizer worked in actual use, but we did not do this until we were above the village of Leeds, where Murray, who had a stop-watch, took the time, after which Frank turned on all lights except in the pilot-room, as too much light there would be confusing to the helmsman.

I asked Murray to wait in the bow until I called and then to come aft. With this understanding I walked slowly to the engine-room but, although it seemed to me that the ship dropped a very little at the stern, she was on a level keel when I reached the equalizer, for the steel ball was at rest at the center of the grooved plate.

After watching it a moment I called to

Murray to come aft, and as he came towards the stern I could feel that either that part of the ship settled slightly or else the bow rose. I was not sure which. The ball rolled quickly towards the stern until it struck the spring at the end of the runway, but before Murray reached my side I felt the deck rise under my feet; the ball rolled back to within a few inches of the opposite spring, and after a few oscillations came to a stop at the center of the equalizer. The ship was again on a level keel.

"Murray," said I, "that little invention is the most wonderful thing I ever saw."

"It works, does it?"

"It certainly does. You stay here and watch it while I go forward and return."

I did not hurry, neither did I walk slowly, but at no time was the deck more than two or three inches out of level from bow to stern, and when I again reached Murray's side the ball was at the center of the equalizer.

"You are perfectly right," said Murray. "It is a wonderful thing."

We tested it again and again, but it always worked. It made no difference whether we passed along the length of the

ship singly or together we were never able to vary the trim of the craft but a few inches, and it always righted itself in a moment or two. We were still testing the thing when Frank called to us that we were approaching the village of Vernon and Murray began to consult his watch.

As we arrived at a point directly above the town Murray turned to Frank, an expression of astonishment on his face, and asked:

"How far apart did you say those villages were?"

"Nine miles by the highway, call it eight by air-line."

"But, good heavens! How fast do you think we are traveling?"

"Well, as we are using only half-speed power I should say that we made the distance in something like twelve or fifteen minutes."

"Ten minutes by my watch, and that means that we are running very close to fifty miles an hour."

"That does not surprise me at all," replied Frank. "You wait until we are running at full speed."

We kept on down the valley until at a

point some three or four miles below Vernon when Frank brought the ship around in a wide curve and commenced the return trip with the propeller whirling at its top speed, driven by the full force of 560 pounds pressure to the square inch.

In a moment the soft hum of the speeding engine rose an octave in pitch, while a slight tremble that was like the nervous energy of high-strung muscles ran through the fiber of the swiftly flying wonder. Straight on over the faintly glowing lights far below, in the little village of Vernon, we fled with the speed of cloud shadows. Straight on through the gleaming moonlight high above the widespread landscape, which seemed to be rushing steadily to the rear, while the purring song of the powerful engine and the swiftly revolving propeller rose about us like a paean of triumph.

I stood by the port window in the pilot-room and gazed down upon the wide but indistinct panorama of fields in which, here and there, showed the darker shadow of wood or single trees, or perhaps a farmhouse where the inmates slumbered in peaceful ignorance of the strange craft

rushing on through the moonlight far above their drowsy heads, with more than double the speed of the fastest express train.

In places there were winding lines of a lighter hue, which I recognized as highways, and a still lighter and far more crooked line I knew to be the small stream that wound its way through the quiet valley.

Through the half-light of the pilot-room I could see the form of Frank at the wheel as he held the soaring craft true to her course towards the few faint spots of light that marked the site of the small hamlet of Leeds, while across from me, at the other window, sat Murray, watch in hand.

I knew that we were traveling at a high rate of speed, but as we raced above the buildings of the little town, and Murray gave us the time in a voice of strong elation, I must admit that I was surprised, for our time was but a few seconds more than four minutes, which gave us a speed of nearly 120 miles an hour.

With this Frank slowed the engine to about half power and sailed on towards home, while Murray and I went aft to learn if there were any hot bearings, but

found nothing of the kind. As we passed above the Byrd farm we saw a tiny point of light describing small circles in the air, and by this we decided that we were yet in sight, as what we saw must have been Frank's father swinging a lantern about his head, but when we came to descend he told us that he had seen nothing but our lights.

We went some ten or fifteen miles to the north, then swung around to the east in a wide circle, which must have covered many miles, and returned so as to pass directly above the little lake. Both Murray and I took our turn at the wheel and found that the ship minded her helm with all the handiness of a good boat or automobile. At a little after midnight we again arrived at the farm, where we descended without trouble and soon had the wonderful craft back in the building in which it had been built.

## CHAPTER VI.

As may be imagined, we each of us had much to say after the trial trip, and this talk resulted in plans for a trip of such length as would constitute a trial which should develop any weakness or fault there might be about the Condor, as we at last agreed to name the airship.

For the flights we had mapped out we should need quite a number of things which we were unable to obtain in Leeds, so Murray went to New York and brought back all that was necessary for our use, such as air-mattresses, wicker-work chairs, a light dining-table, aluminum tableware and cooking utensils. Most of these things could have been made of rasm, but we did not wish to wait to have it done.

Frank took advantage of this opportunity to prepare a large supply of the gas-producing ingredients, for this was something which it would not do to run short of. Of course, we laid in an ample stock of food and water.

At last all was ready, even to some new lockers under the side windows of the pilot-



room, which could be used for lounging seats and in which we stored our maps, charts and navigation instruments. We sailed at midnight, so as not to be observed, and as the night was moonless and cloudy it was, of course, very dark. This did not stop us, as in other respects the weather was favorable, there being no wind. We would be obliged to steer by compass, as it would be impossible to distinguish anything except lights upon the surface of the earth, but we intended to steer by compass in any event by day as well as by night.

We bade Frank's parents good-bye and shook hands with them through the pilot-room window just before we rose from the ground. Mrs. Byrd was rather tearful and nervous, but Frank comforted her to some extent by cheerfully saying that she need not worry, as she would see us back again, safe and sound, within a few days at the most.

We had so arranged it that the tricks at the wheel should be of three hours each. This would give each one of us six hours rest at a time. We drew lots for the watches, and the first had fallen to me while Frank drew the second.

"Are you ready?" I asked, as I took my place in the helmsman's seat.

"All right, let her go," replied Frank. "Good-bye, mother; good-bye, father," he called again as the Condor rose slowly into the blackness of the sky.

I kept the gas-switch open until we were 1,500 feet from the ground by the statiscopes, as the only danger we should be likely to encounter, flying in the dark, was that of striking against some high object, and this I did not intend to do.

As we had slept but little the night before and worked hard through the day, the boys soon became drowsy, as once we were on our way they had nothing to do. After a number of frightful yawns, Murray swore that he was going to turn in, and as a matter of fact, he did, to sleep until 6 A. M., if he cared to, while Frank was soon slumbering peacefully upon one of the lockers.

This may sound a bit unnatural to the reader, but both were young men of iron nerves and, besides that, we had the utmost confidence in the stability and safety of the ship. The only sound that came to me was the soft purr of the propeller or the low song of the engine, while the only sense of

movement I got was when the light from the window of some lonely farmhouse, or those of a village street drifted steadily to the rear, far below.

At three o'clock I roused Frank, who did not seem to appreciate the attention, as he sat rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"How is she going?" he asked, with a wide yawn.

"Fine; nothing could work better," I replied.

"What's the course?" he asked as he took his seat by the wheel.

"Southwest."

"All right; go to bed." And after a short examination of the engine and propeller bearings I did as he said.

If it gives one a strange sensation to sit in a flying machine and steer one's way above the earth, what must it be to undress and go to bed when there are 2,000 feet of space between your bed and the ground below? I did not believe that I should sleep at all this first night, but I was mistaken, and I wish to say right here there is no place where man ever slept where sleep is so refreshing and perfect as it is in the air a half mile or so from the ground. I was

asleep in five minutes and awoke only when Frank shook me by the shoulder, saying that breakfast was ready.

It was broad day and the sunlight was streaming through the open window in a golden flood. I sprang from my bunk and without waiting to dress went to the window. This was the first time I had ever viewed the world from the Condor by the light of day, and at first, as I gazed down through the frightful distance, I drew back with a sinking of the heart which almost amounted to panic.

We were moving scarcely at all; the propeller was still and the breeze so light that our drift did not amount to more than a mile or so in an hour. We were more than a mile above the earth and the view spread before my eyes fairly took my breath by its frightful immensity.

Directly below us, and so far away that men moving about the streets appeared no larger than ants, lay a city which, by its harbor, the bridges that spanned the gleaming river, the narrow, crooked streets, the common and public garden, and the golden dome of the State house I recognized as Boston.

Ferryboats and tugs crawled about in the harbor like waterbugs, while a huge battleship which lay off the Charlestown navy yard appeared no more than a toy boat. Beyond the harbor and its islands lay the sea, blue as the sky and apparently as limitless. Here other toy ships crawled either towards or away from the city, some with a smudge of brown hanging above them in tiny clouds of smoke while others showed the gleaming white of canvas against the deep blue of the ocean.

I stood gazing at this wonderful sight with a rapture which I believe would have held me spellbound for hours if Frank had not yelled for me to come to breakfast, which, together with the smell of cooking food and steaming coffee, hurried me into my clothes and away to the engine-room to wash. I think that the simple act of making my toilet at a sink where fresh water ran from a faucet while the soiled water ran away through a pipe with an outlet so far from the earth that the water turned to vapor long before it could reach the ground, brought home the strangeness of our position as much as any one thing that had taken place since the Condor had been in existence.

When I entered the dining-room I found Murray in the act of seating himself at a table loaded with good things to eat while Frank was filling the aluminum cups with fragrant coffee.

"Good morning, my friend," said Murray. "Have you concluded to leave the view long enough to eat?"

"It is the most wonderful sight I ever imagined, and honestly, it seems a crime to leave it just to fill one's stomach with common, earth-grown food," I replied, grasping each by the hand before taking my place at the table.

"It certainly is wonderful, but we shall get our fill of it, for, unless you object, we have decided to float around in this vicinity for a part of the day," replied Murray, helping himself to a hot roll.

"I shall not object to that arrangement, but is that the reason why you stopped the engine?"

"Yes; it has not been running since four o'clock."

"I was afraid something had happened to it when I found it still."

"Nothing can happen to that engine," said

Frank, with conviction, as he cracked his second egg.

When we had breakfasted—and we did linger over it—we left things as they were and devoted our attention to the magnificent view until it was time for dinner, only starting the engine now and then to maintain our position above the city. After dinner we got under way and ran straight out to sea until the coast was but a shadow upon the horizon, but as we wanted to get the effect of the city with its lights we returned shortly after sunset and hovered above the lighted streets until midnight, when we again got under way, this time for the city of New York.

## CHAPTER VII.

At this time there was rather a stiff breeze blowing from the northwest, while our course should have been very nearly southwest, but we decided to keep near the coast and run slowly so as not to reach New York until about daylight, or later. It was Murray's trick at the wheel, and after we were well on our course Frank and I turned in, but I did not get much rest, as it was my watch from three until six A. M.

When I relieved Murray at three o'clock it was quite dark, but would soon be light, as it was the month of August and early in the month at that. He told me that he was not at all sure about our position except that we were over the sea, which he knew, as it was possible to hear the sound of the waves by listening at an open window.

I lit a pipe to keep me awake and, as I believed we had drifted to the south through the force of the wind much further than we wished, I changed the course from southwest to west and settled down to my three hours' watch. Day broke soon and I was not surprised to find that there was no land



in sight, and believing that we were too far south, even with the change of course, I headed the Condor into the west by north. We were 1,500 feet above the sea, which I noticed was rather rough, although not at all bad. As there was no longer any reason for traveling slowly I threw the three-quarters speed switch and the ship responded nobly, although she was running into a stiff breeze.

Just before the sun rose I caught sight of an object floating on the water some little distance ahead and so far away that I was unable to make out what it was until I got it within the field of a glass, when I saw that it was a man apparently supported by a life-preserver, as I could see something white about his chest. That he was alive I knew, as I saw him lift his head and look about him.

First pressing the button to arouse both Frank and Murray, I slowed the engine and opened the outlet valves so as to bring the Condor nearer the water. By the time we had dropped to within 100 feet of the sea the man in the water was not over 300 feet away, but I could not see that he had sighted the ship even then.

Frank was the first to arrive, and he came running into the pilot-room, only partly dressed, asking what the matter was.

"There is a man in the sea," said I, slowing the engine still more.

"Where?"

"Right ahead, and only a few rods at that," I replied as I let a little more gas escape.

"I see him, and he is alive, too. Keep on as you are while we get out a rope," and he rushed away to the engine-room, where there were several coils of inch line.

He was back in a moment and Murray with him, for although it was impossible for me to see them from my seat, I could hear all that was said. They had the door open and the line out, and as they shouted to the man in the water I saw him tip back his head and look up at the Condor in amazement. By this time we were so nearly above where he floated that I was obliged to lean far over the wheel to see him.

"Is the rope long enough?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Frank, "but go as slowly as you can and still keep her under control."

I could hear them shouting to the man to catch hold of the line and belay it to the

life-preserver, and in a moment more I knew that this had been done, as the extra weight began dragging the Condor still nearer the sea, and by the time they had him hauled through the door the ship was not over ten or twelve feet from the water. The instant they had him inside I threw the gas-switch and we rose rapidly into the air.

They led the rescued man away to the bunkroom, where he was quickly stripped of his wet clothing and given such treatment as was most necessary for his comfort. Frank soon returned to the pilot-room, but by that time I had the Condor more than a thousand feet above the sea and again on our course.

"How is your patient?" I asked.

"Oh, he's doing well. Seems to be as fresh as a daisy."

"Do you know how long he had been in the water, or how he came there?"

"Yes, he said he fell overboard from a lumber schooner about two o'clock this morning."

"How did he come by the life-preserver?"

"He says that he does not know whether he pulled it overboard with him or if some-

one threw it after him. He doesn't seem to have much of an idea about it anyway."

"Probably drunk."

"I don't think so. He hasn't the appearance of a drinking man."

"Is he a sailor?"

"I think so," he replied, as he began getting breakfast.

Before the meal was ready Murray appeared with the rescued man in tow. He had rigged him out with some of our extra clothing and the man really seemed but little the worse from what he had been through, but he was rather nervous from the strange position in which he now found himself.

Murray told us that when the stranger first looked from the window and saw the distance to the water he was so astonished and bewildered that he could hardly speak. He came into the pilot-room with an air of trying to make himself as light as it was possible for him to be and stared about with nervous starts, as though he expected something was going to blow up or burst at any moment.

He was a lightly built man of forty or forty-five, and unquestionably an Ameri-

can. He had rather thin, light brown hair and wore no beard with the exception of a small tuft on the point of his long chin. He was far from being handsome, but there was a look about his pleasant gray eyes and grimly humorous mouth that I liked.

He had wonderful eyes, I know that, for as he stood near me gazing upon the wide expanse of sea ahead he suddenly lifted his hand, and pointing a little to the right of our course said in a soft but nasal voice:

“Land ho!”

Now I could see nothing that had the least appearance of land—and I have good eyes, too—but the man was right, the land was there; it soon hove into view plainly enough for anyone to see.

After we had breakfasted, it being Frank’s watch, I began talking with our passenger, who told me that his name was Amos Burnham; that he had followed the sea from boyhood, some of the time as a seaman, but generally as a cook.

“What do you think of this craft,” I asked.

“She’s a wonder, all right, but what kind of a contraption do you call her, anyway?”

“It’s a flying machine, or airship.”

"I see that, but it doesn't seem to be a balloon or an aeroplane either."

"It is not either one."

"Well, don't you think it's a little bit dangerous to be flying around so high in the air, even in this craft?" he asked with an uneasy glance at the sea, far below.

"No, for, as a matter of fact, you are safer from harm right now than you ever were in your life."

He could only gaze at me in astonishment at this, so I began explaining the way the ship worked, the strength of the metal of which it was composed, and the wonderful gas which held us up and furnished us with power.

"But," said he, "what if the gas-tube you talk about should bust? Where would we be then?"

"If it should burst then, of course, we should fall, but there is no danger of that," and I explained why.

I took him from room to room, showed him the engine and the rest of the machinery, the equalizer, the safety-valves, which made danger from bursting out of the question, and the many other appliances for controlling the ship, but the parts which

seemed to appeal to him the most were the wheel and the binnacle with its card and compass. When I told him that we could fly at the rate of 120 miles an hour he seemed to doubt my word until I called his attention to the speed with which we were approaching the land against a head wind.

"Well, sir," said he, at last, "I never expected to have any hankerin' to ship in a flying machine, but I've got to give up, for I'll admit right now that if there was a berth open for me in this here craft I would hate to refuse it like time, I would."

This remark set me to thinking, and the more I thought the more I liked the idea. None of us were very fond of the cook's part of the work in this strange craft, for washing dishes a mile from the earth is but little different from doing the same thing in a hotel kitchen.

"Are you a married man, Mr. Burnham?" I asked.

"No, sir, I ain't married, nor never was an' never expect to be. Another thing that I'd like to say is that if it don't make any difference to you I'd a good deal rather you'd call me Amos, as I hardly know who you are speakin' to when you call me Mr.

Burnham. You see I've been Amos to everybody since I was out o' dresses."

"All right, Amos, but were you just talking when you spoke of shipping with us, or do you really mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. I'm in th' world with nobody to care or worry about me. I suppose that even Cap'n Barnes of th' Mary Wilkins, th' schooner I fell overboard from this mornin', thinks I'm at th' bottom of th' sea."

"If you want the position of cook in this craft you can have it. Your pay will be good and you draw it whether we are on the land or in the air."

"I'll sign on at those terms," he replied, "and will begin right now if you'll learn me th' run o' your galley an' that new-fangled stove you've got in it."

Both Frank and Murray were delighted when I told them that they would no longer have to cook or wash dishes. We soon found that the man we had hauled from the sea was a lucky find, for he proved to be a good cook, and besides that he was neat and cleanly about his work.

We were soon in sight of the great city of New York, and at a height of over a mile



circled about over that metropolis for some time when we headed the Condor for Washington. As the wind was with us and the engine working at nearly full speed we reached the capitol at about sunset, and as we had no desire of being sighted we kept at a high altitude, and when it became too dark to view the city we again got under way, with the ship's head pointed into the northwest, with Chicago as our next destination.

My watch that night was from nine until twelve, and when I went on duty it was quite dark with a few stars showing in the north, but otherwheres the sky was filled with huge banks of black clouds, which promised wind or rain, and perhaps both.

The others turned in at about ten o'clock, and with all of the ship dark, except the lights over the gauges and in the binnacle, I sat by the wheel and steered the flying wonder. There was very little wind and the Condor held her course without much attention from me, and as we were fully 3,000 feet above the earth there was no need of watching the road ahead.

Now and then I would see the lights of a town or city and several times I saw lighted

passenger trains crawling through the deep darkness which shrouded the land below me. The clouds to the west grew blacker and more threatening and by eleven o'clock lightning began quivering through their depths, and so great was the extent of the electrical storm we were approaching that the flashes could be seen, at one time or another, through the whole sky from the south through the west into the north.

As the Condor was traveling at the rate of seventy-five miles an hour and the storm sweeping towards us at a swift pace the ship was bound to run into it in a very short time if we kept on as we were. At first I was tempted to awaken the others and get their opinion as to the best course, but after a little thought I determined to use my own judgment.

There was nothing about the Condor to attract lightning except our electric-light outfit and, as that was enclosed by rasm, I could not see how there could be much danger, as rasm is non-conductive. I also believed it would be possible to go clear of the storm.

If I was to try it at all it must be done soon, as the storm was now so near that the

pilot-room was brilliantly lighted by every flash as it streamed across the angry sky or plunged like a dagger of flame to the distant earth.

There were three courses to choose from. I could turn tail and run, but I did not believe that even the Condor could distance the storm. I could go on as I was and feel the strength of the engine against the power of the wind and run the risk of being struck by lightning, or else I must try to get above the clouds. The last was the course I concluded to follow.

I left the gas-switch open for nearly two minutes while the Condor rose rapidly. In fact, she rose too rapidly, for my ears began drumming in a way that caused me to close the valves as suddenly as I had opened them, but this uncomfortable sensation soon passed. Within five minutes I realized that the storm clouds were lower than the ship, for the lightning no longer appeared above me and soon there was nothing between the Condor and the clear, star-studded sky, while below, extending for miles, lay the huge masses of clouds like a sea of fog.

Every moment or two this ocean of vapor would be shot through by a glowing stream

of electric flame which pulsed and trembled in many vivid colors, but as a rule I saw nothing of the bolt itself, although now and then a dazzling stream of blinding fire would zigzag across the billows of vapor below me in thrilling splendor. None of these bolts came very near the ship.

At this great height there did not seem to be much wind, but it was cold, so cold that the windows would soon have been covered with frost if I had not turned on the electric heat. Of course, the air was rather thin, but I suffered little discomfort from it. There was more or less roaring in my ears, which I noticed little on account of the infernal din of thunder. I had always understood that people in balloons were not able to hear thunder to any great extent, but if they had been with us in the Condor they would have admitted that there was such a thing as thunder above the clouds.

From the time when the ship first attained a high altitude until the storm was passed there was a nearly continual din, although it did not sound as it does from the ground. It was not so heavy, more like the rattle of light artillery. That and the cold soon

roused the others and Murray suddenly appeared in the pilot-room.

"Where in the dickens are we?" he asked in a voice not entirely free from alarm.

"Above the clouds," I replied.

"What is it, a thunder-storm?"

"It is, and a bad one, too, but it is far below us and we are not even in danger of getting wet."

Frank and Amos soon appeared, but neither of them showed fear, if they felt it. As soon as Frank understood our position he said that we were in no danger and that I had done the very thing he should if he had been at the wheel. Within an hour the storm had passed and we found ourselves looking down upon the lights of a large city from a height which was frightful to contemplate.

At twelve o'clock I surrendered the wheel to Frank and went to bed. The next thing I knew Amos stood by the berth, calling me to breakfast. I went at once to the window and found that we were high above a great sheet of water, while some two or three miles to the south lay the city of Chicago.

The Condor was headed to the breezes, which was blowing briskly from the west,

but the engine was working with only power enough to enable the ship to hold her position. After breakfast we flew over the city in a wide circle when the Condor was headed to the east, and running at a speed of 75 miles an hour we were away for the Niagara Falls, which we reached in about six hours. From here we flew nearly the whole length of Lake Ontario and across the country to our starting point, which we reached just after sunset, and as soon as it was dark enough to cover our arrival we landed on the meadow back of the farm buildings.

The trip had been made as we planned. We had been able to go wherever we choose, had overcome as bad a storm as we should be likely to encounter in the Eastern States, had traveled something like 2,000 miles, saved one life, and returned to our starting point without accident or mishap. The ship was a success if anything ever was.

## CHAPTER VIII.

The next morning, after we had breakfasted and Amos had given Frank's parents one more version of his rescue from the sea—which made three times he had recounted this adventure, and the last was always different, more thrilling and hair-raising than the one before—we left the good woman to her housework while we went to the laboratory to smoke and decide upon our next move.

"The question," said Murray, as he lit his pipe, "is a matter of money. I, for one, should like to spend a few years in seeing the world from the Condor, but, as you know, even this mode of traveling will cost something and the most of our capital is exhausted."

"Well," said Amos, "it ain't none of my business, but I suppose you know that you can make a pile o' money givin' shows and takin' folks for short trips in th' ship, don't ye?"

"I suppose so," said Murray, with a smile, "but I don't exactly like the idea of turning showman."

"Well, perhaps not, but there's lots of money in th' show business," returned Amos earnestly. "I used to know a feller that had a boy twelve or thirteen years old that had an extra toe on each foot. Well, sir, they got a small tent an' used to go 'round to fairs an' such like an' charge ten cents just to see them 'ere toes. Now, for a fact, I've seen th' old man sellin' tickets in front of that tent, 'long towards night, when he would have as many as three or four paper dollars stuck 'tween his fingers all at one time. Oh, I tell ye, there's money in th' show business."

"But don't you see, Amos, the ship might not draw so well as extra toes," laughed Murray.

"I suppose," said Frank, "that we could sell the ship or the formula for making the gas or rasm, or both, and I believe they would bring enough so that none of us need earn another dollar as long as we live, but I should much rather not sell just now.

"What is your idea, Jack?" asked Murray.

"I shall not vote to sell at this time," I replied.

"What would you do? You know that we shall soon be broke unless we do some-



thing with the ship or else go back to engineering."

"I will tell you what I have in mind, but if it doesn't suit the rest of you, say so and we will drop it and turn to something else."

"Go ahead. We'll try anything once."

"Very well," I replied, "but it may not look good to you. While I was in Mexico, building railroads where goats could hardly get a foothold, I ran onto a good many queer customers. Well, one man of this description that I fell in with was about as great a globe-trotter as I ever happened to meet. He had dug gold in Russia, California, Australia and Alaska. He had been a mine owner, a tramp, smuggler, sailor, prospector and about everything else. At two or three times he had attained wealth and at other times he hardly owned the rags on his back. He had also dug diamonds in Africa and Brazil.

"At the time I knew him he was prospecting for silver in Mexico and he expected to be successful. What interested me as much as any one thing he told me was an account he gave of an expedition with which he was connected that tried to penetrate the unexplored regions of the Andes

and other parts of South America. It doesn't make any difference to us what they were after, and all that I shall say about it is in regard to one thing of which he told me.

"He said that at the base of what they knew to be an extinct volcano of great height they found a place where diamonds could be mined, yes, dug out, just as readily as you can dig out cobbles on this farm. He had no doubt but that they would have brought away enough of them to have made every one of the party enormously wealthy if they had not been molested. As it was they were surprised by a large party of natives, and after a sharp fight all of the whites with the exception of this man and three others were killed.

He and his three living companions were taken prisoners, but only the man who told me this story ever returned. He said that the ambition of his life was to lead a strong force into the land where he left about every friend he had in the world, as he would not only avenge them but would also return the richest man living."

"What was this adventurer's name?" asked Murray.

"Ransome White."

"Do you believe he was telling the truth?"

"I'm very sure he was. He could never have got the story so complete as to dates and names of places as well as the names of the men in the party unless he had actually been there himself. I had heard of the expedition before I ever saw him and I know that none of the men who composed it, unless it was White, were ever heard from after they disappeared in the wilds of South America."

"Did he tell you where this volcano was? In what country?"

"Yes, in a way. They had instruments for taking latitude and longitude and he said that the place where they found the diamonds was not far from 68 degrees west and 10 degrees south. This would place them somewhere in Northern Peru. It is not very definite, but he seemed to feel that he could get back there if he had the chance."

"Do you know where this White is now?" asked Frank.

"No more than you do."

"Well, what is your idea? Do you believe that we could find that extinct volcano from what he told you?"

"I don't know that we could, and I am not sure that we couldn't," I replied.

"Are you in favor of having a try at it?" asked Frank, in an eager tone.

"I think so. Why shouldn't we? We have an airship which will carry us into the vicinity of that mountain inside of a week, under conditions that are at all favorable, while reaching that place by any other means would take months. We can scrape up money enough to stock the ship with all we need, and take along a supply of food for six months at that, besides whatever we think best in the way of arms and trade-stuff for a possible dicker with such natives as we happen to fall in with."

"I like the idea the best way," exclaimed Frank, "and I, for one, shall vote to go."

"You must remember," said I, "that the chances are that we will not find diamonds or anything else of very much value, but it will be a trip to remember to the end of our days, for there is a chance for all kinds of adventures before we see northern New York again."

"Of course there is, and I wouldn't miss it for a chance to be President."

"Or half the diamonds we find," laughed Murray.

"Yes, and that too, but what do you say, Sam?" he asked, turning to Murray.

"Oh, I'm ready to go any time you say, but it may not turn out to be very much of a picnic."

"We don't expect a picnic, but it's going to be the greatest sport that any men ever attempted. You mark my words."

"I suppose you will go, won't you, Amos?" I asked, turning to the cook, who sat humped up on a bucket smoking a short clay pipe, as though that was all he cared for in this life.

"To be sure, I'll go. Hain't I signed on to go wherever th' ship goes?"

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say that," said Murray, "for if I had to cook and wash dishes this voyage, I believe I'd back out."

## CHAPTER IX.

It took some little time to get ready for such a trip as this promised to be, as there were many things which we felt we must have which could not be procured short of the city markets. Besides this, it was highly necessary to supply ourselves with an ample amount of gas producer, but at last all was ready for the long voyage.

I rather expected it would be necessary to get a pressure of two or three pounds to the inch in the gas-tube to raise the Condor to a height of 1,500 feet with the load we had in her, but in this I was happily disappointed, as we didn't even have to close the air-cocks. This was rather surprising, as the ship was loaded heavily with food and water to last for months, besides a lot of trade-stuff, such as knives, small mirrors, brass and glass beads, highly colored cloth and handkerchiefs. We also took along arms for hunting or warfare, whichever we found. These consisted of four Winchester rifles, four automatic pistols, and two double-barreled shotguns for small game.

We rose easily and quickly to a height of about 2,000 feet when the Condor was headed straight into the south, for that was our true course. We paid no attention to the land, but sailed entirely by compass, flying, as nearly as we could judge, at the rate of seventy-five miles an hour. We had the best of weather conditions and no mishap until after we had passed over the island of Cuba and were well down the Carribbean sea.

In fact, it was just as we sighted the northern coast of South America that we ran into the only really bad weather we had encountered so far, but this was bad enough to make up for all the fair weather we had been favored with. It was one of the worst electrical storms I ever saw.

We tried to get above it before it could break upon us, but the Condor was so loaded and the storm came upon us so suddenly that we got mixed up in a part of it, and for a matter of ten minutes or so I would have sold all my chances at South American diamonds for a small spot on the good green earth.

We were in the heart of dense clouds that simply blazed and scintillated with light-

ning. It streamed and leaped about the Condor in blinding flashes and sheets of gleaming blue and violet, while the ship shuddered and trembled under deafening shocks and rattling volleys of bursting thunder. It crashed and boomed about us until it seemed as though the ship would be shaken and jarred into pieces if by any chance she escaped annihilation by means of the amazing lightning.

All through this nerve-racking inferno it seemed to me that by no possible chance could the Condor escape destruction, and when we at last rose slowly through the upper layer of storm-rent clouds into the blessed sunlight my surprise was almost as great as my relief. So far as we could see the ship had suffered no harm in any way except that the compass had gone crazy.

Murray, who was at the wheel during this shakeup, said that the compass-hand had whirled about on its axis so swiftly that it was impossible to follow it with the eye except when it stopped to begin spinning the other way, and that it continually spat out sparks and blue flame as it whirled.

There had been a good deal of wind down among the clouds, but by the time we had



attained a height of a few hundred feet above them the worst of it was left behind. Up here there was nothing more than a strong current of cold air that as nearly as we could judge by the sun—for the compass was still acting queerly—was blowing from the north, which made it a fair wind for us.

All through the day and night we flew on into the south without further trouble until near midnight, when we encountered a strong head wind which reduced our speed by more than half. At daybreak we found that we were over a country which appeared to be nearly as level as a floor. We knew this by the sluggish current of the stream. It was a vast and heavily-wooded plain or swamp.

Here we flew over a mighty river, which we decided must be one of the tributaries, or upper reaches, of the Amazon. We judged it to be a mile wide, and flowing, as it did, through such a level country it turned and twisted upon itself with such amazing crookedness that even at our height it was almost impossible to follow its course with the eye. There were many smaller streams which, although they, too, wound about like

huge snakes, at last flowed into the great river.

Besides the streams there were hundreds of lakes, ponds and stagnant pools gleaming under the blazing sun, and, indeed, it seemed as though the mighty forest itself was standing knee deep in water. For almost a whole day we sailed over country of this description. At no time did we see any indication of mankind, but the streams and ponds were teeming with life, as undoubtedly was the tropical forest, which seemed to have no limit.

As to the life in and about the water, we saw enough to cause us to be thankful that we were flying above instead of trying to force our way through the great jungle. By the aid of the glass we saw huge crocodiles sunning upon mud banks or lazily floating in the water, while once we made out the loathsome form of a great serpent festooned from the dead branches of a tree which lay in the stream, and at still another place saw one of these huge snakes swimming across a stagnant pool. We were some distance from them, but still near enough for us.

Besides these unpleasant inhabitants of the vast swamp we saw birds by thousands

and of many different sizes and colors. Long-legged, huge waders, with plumage of milky whiteness, or, in other cases, of a deep red or scarlet, were always in evidence. We also saw many ducks of different kinds, most of which were new to us, and still other birds of brilliant colors and of about the size of parrots, but whether they were parrots or not we were unable to decide.

Some idea of the vastness of this terrible swamp can be had from the fact that we neither passed over nor saw, even from our elevation, anything different until well along in the afternoon. By then the swamp had nearly passed to the rear to be replaced by low, wooded hills. The streams showed current and even foaming rapids in places, while now and then the gleaming white of spume and froth showed where the roaring flood churned its way over rock-bound falls in a hurried race to the stinking stagnation of the vast swamp, but even here the streams were hemmed in by the green banks of the tropical jungle.

Just as the sun sank to the horizon we caught sight of a range of mountains far in the southwest which could be none other

than the Andes, for even at that distance they towered into the blue of the sky like gray thunder-heads, but darkness soon shut them from our sight.

We ran slowly through the night, but even at that by sunrise we were not far from the vast mountains which rose height upon height, their base the foundations of a continent, their summits piercing the clouds. We did not at this time attempt to rise to anything like the altitude of these giant peaks, but flew to the south, keeping well in towards the range and slowly ascending until we were some hundreds of feet above the timber line.

At about ten o'clock we sighted a shoulder of the mountain which was bare of trees and level, and here we made a landing to take sights. We had supplied ourselves with an alt-azimuth for the purpose, but, as we were unfamiliar with its use, we were unable to get results which we believed to be correct or anywhere near it. We anchored the Condor and remained there on the bare shoulder of the mountain for two days, hunting and exploring, and although we took some small game in the forest be-

low us, we found no indications of precious stones or metals.

The morning of the third day we got under way, flying to the south until we found another landing place. Here we also explored the country for long distances in every direction, but again without success. For nearly two weeks we followed this plan, and not once did we discover any sign of diamonds or even the clay in which they are found, and so far as an extinct volcano was concerned, it didn't appear.

There was nothing very strange about that, as we, being unable to take sights with any degree of correctness, had little idea where we were, although we believed we were in the vicinity of the volcano Ransome White had told me of, but still, it might not be within 500 miles of us.

Every day or two we changed our position and explored hundreds of square miles of territory, but we found nothing of value. Things had been going on like this, as I have said, for about two weeks when one night, as we sat about the table holding a council as to what we had better do next, Frank suddenly brought his hand down with a smack and said:

"I believe that we have made a big mistake of the whole thing ever since we arrived at the mountain range."

"Why do you say that?" asked Murray.

"Because I now believe that we should have gone higher up on the range."

"But," said I, "White, the man who is really responsible for our being here, said that the party he was with did not reach a high altitude."

"No," said Murray, "and as I understand it they didn't climb the sides of the volcano at all. They found the diamonds somewhere about the base of it."

"And it is the base of that mountain we are looking for," said I. "The top would be of no use to us."

"That's all right," replied Frank, "so far as it goes, but we'll never find it by doing as we have."

"How will your plan help us?"

"In this way. By working from a greater height we should get a much more extended view of the country. From above a volcano would not appear like any other mountain, as there would be a cone, which no other mountain would have. By ranging back and forth we could practically ex-

amine every rod of thousands of square miles in a very few days."

"Th' boy's right," said Amos.

"I'm not sure but that he is, for a fact," said Murray. "What do you think of it?" he asked turning to me.

"I think so well of the idea that I believe we had better adopt it at once. I wonder we did not think of it before."

"Why not do a good job while we are about it?" asked Murray.

"How do you mean?"

"Why, commence at the top at once. We can see more from there than from anywhere else. Let's strike for the heights to begin with."

"I'm willing if the Condor can do it," I replied.

"She'll make it. Don't worry about that," said Frank.

"I believe so myself," said Murray, "but when had we better make the attempt?"

"It will depend on the weather," I replied. "We could accomplish nothing while the mountain-tops were shrouded in clouds. We must have a clear day and not too much wind."

**"I rather think," said Amos, "that you'll git th' kind of a day ye want without much waitin', for, unless I'm mistaken tomorrow will be clear an' about as nigh a dead calm as you'll ever see on these 'ere mountains."**

**"Let us hope that you are a true weather prophet, Amos," said Murray.**



## CHAPTER X.

We always kept a watch whether we were at anchor or a thousand feet from the earth, and tonight was no different from others in that respect. It was Murray's watch from nine in the evening until midnight, and at about ten the rest of us turned in to get the needed rest for the hard day before us.

It was my watch from twelve to three, and when Murray had turned in I slipped into a warm coat, for although we were not far from the Equator, the nights were cold on account of the high altitude. With the coat well buttoned about me and a lighted pipe between my teeth I went out upon the rocky shelf, where the Condor rested, to get a breath of fresh air and have a look at the weather.

The sky was perfectly clear. The moon, which was in the first quarter, had already disappeared beyond the mountains, but the stars blazed like points of flame. Far below me, and many miles away, embedded in the blackness of the surrounding forest, lay a lake which, because of the

still air of the night, threw back the reflection of the gleaming stars so truly that it seemed to me I was looking through a hole in the earth at the stars shining upon the other side of the world.

Somewhere in the great forest below me I could hear, sometimes plainly and then again but faintly, the subdued roar of a mountain stream as it made its turbulent way to the lake with its jewels of reflected stars.

It was peaceful and quiet, and yet there were few moments in which there was perfect silence. Night birds called to each other, their voices rising weirdly from the mysterious forest, and twice I heard the high, quavering cry of the puma. Coming, as it did, from that vast wilderness of black darkness and strange cries, there was something about it which brought to my nerves a thrill of expectation and subdued excitement which crawled and crinkled about my spinal cord and the short hairs at the back of my neck.

I heard only two of the blood-stirring calls, and after waiting in vain for more I at last fell to pacing the age-worn ledge, an exercise from which I soon desisted to

gaze with awe at the clearly defined summit of the towering rampart of sullen rock, and as I gazed I could not help wondering if the strange craft by my side could develop a power mighty enough to lift itself and us to that stupendous height. It did not seem to be a possibility, and yet I knew that it would do it and with the same ease with which its namesake rises into the blue above the loftiest crags of these mighty mountains.

My watch was more than half passed as I again fell to pacing the smooth rock, which had been worn to that state by thousands and perhaps millions of years of rain and wind, and as I paced and wondered at the age of these weather-worn rocks, I was drawn slowly from my dreaming by the signs which herald the birth of a new day.

The light was no stronger as yet, but from the eastern horizon faint lines of the palest amber wavered indistinctly against the deep blue of the clear sky, and as they broadened and ran higher into the star-studded duskiness they changed from amber to orange and to gold.

Soon long streamers of reds and yellows wavered and swept across the sky in a riot

of barbaric splendor, while the stars faded into tiny points of silver, to be at last wiped into nothingness by still other streamers of blazing reds and scarlet. The gray heights of the towering mountains glowed with reflected glory; the shimmering green of the vast forest stood out from the blackness of the lower depths, and the water of the distant lake turned to burnished gold.

As the splendid rays of blazing light grew stronger I suddenly realized that there could never be a better day for our flight to the crest, upon which the sunlight would soon be breaking in a flood of glory, than this day promised to be. With a shout I pushed open the door and entered the Condor.

"Up, ye laggards, and welcome the grandest morn you ever saw!" I cried, as I went on into the pilot-room and took my place in the operator's seat.

I did not start the engine, as there was so little air moving our drift was very small. We were slowly rising, and that was enough for the time being. I knew that it would be far better for us to ascend slowly, so as to get accustomed to the change in the atmosphere which we should have to meet.

For this reason I allowed but a small amount of gas to enter the lifting tube at a time.

It was a little past four when we breakfasted by the clear light of the newly risen sun. We were by now within a thousand feet of the summit as to altitude, but some little distance away from the mountain crest. As soon as we finished the meal Frank, whose watch it was, started the engine, and running at half speed we again began slowly rising with the Condor headed straight for the gray horizon which loomed above us.

We had ascended but a small part of the last thousand feet when Murray said he could smell gas.

"The lifting tube is full," said Frank. "Close the air-cocks."

For the first time while in flight the pressure of the gas began to show on the gauges. There was but a very few ounces difference in them at any time, and when we reached a height more than sufficient to carry us over the loftiest pinnacle of storm-scarred rock there was a pressure of less than four pounds to the square inch.

Our discomfiture through the effects of

this high altitude was not such as I had expected. I cannot say how it affected the others, but for myself it was not bad. My heart beat was quickened to some degree and there was a good deal of roaring in my ears, but it amounted to nothing in the end, nor did I bleed at the nose.

Of course, the view was wonderful. The sun was now above the horizon for us, but the wooded plain below was still in the clear dusk of the early morning. To the naked eye all that lay beyond the mountain slope appeared to be perfectly level, although we were well aware that this was not the case, but from this altitude even a high hill made no more impression on the eye than a small knoll, and that was none at all.

This vast stretch of country extending from the foothills to the horizon was to us an almost limitless expanse of different shades of green with rivers and lakes which had the appearance of threads and splashes of molten silver thrown upon a green carpet, but the strangest thing about it all was that the horizon seemed to be level with us.

It had seemed to us that if we once

reached the crest of the range we should be able to obtain a view of the western slope, but this was not the case, as we found. The top of this immense range of mountains instead of rising to a roof-like crest was miles across in most places, and the absolute desolation and wildness of that barren horror of ice-scarred rock was beyond words to express. No living thing could be found here. Nothing but the sullen monotony of gray rock except where some jagged tooth of ledge or a yawning hole gave lodgment for great masses of ice, which seemed to be as old as the mountain itself.

As soon as we reached a height nearly equal to that of the crest we encountered a strong wind from the west, or northwest, which was so cold that we had to use the electric heat to keep the windows from icing over. Frank put on full power and steered straight into the west, flying at a height which would clear the loftiest pinnacles in sight.

After a few miles of this we suddenly shot out over a cliff, when it seemed as though we had reached the end of the world, for, far below us, extending into a distance so infinite that sea-line and sky-line melted

into misty blue, lay the great Pacific.

We all cried out in wonder at first and then gazed in silent awe. It was more than magnificent, it was frightful in its immensity. Being so far from us the ocean did not appear at all as it generally does to the beholder; to the naked eye there were no waves, no movement to show that it was water. It was like looking down into the sky, if such a thing were possible.

This view was not all pleasure. The height at which the Condor soared was so great that to gaze down upon the distant sea gave one a giddy sensation which soon amounted to a feeling of nausea. For this reason and also because there was no use in looking for what we were after on this side of the range Frank steered to the southwest and we soon lost our wonderful view of the sea.

The farther south we went the wider appeared the top of the mountains, until at last there seemed to be no limit to the barren waste of savage rock.

The terrible loneliness and desolation of this vast summit began to get on my nerves. It is impossible to describe it, but if one can imagine a vast plain of solid rock, hun-



dreds of miles in extent, which at some remote period had been convulsed by some terrible force and rent into thousands of ragged, storm-scarred ridges and gigantic tooth-like pinnacles protruding from gaping crevices and ice-filled rents in the living rock, then some idea of the horror it gave one may be appreciated. Nothing that creeps, crawls or walks could ever have gone fifty feet in a straight line across this frightful desolation. To fly was the only means of progression.

Having borne the place as long as I could I went to Frank and asked him why he did not steer more to the east so as to get a more extended view of the eastern slope and also to get us away from this nightmare of barren rock. To me it suggested nothing but the place of the dead.

"I shall," said he, "as soon as we clear that cliff which you can see rising up ahead of us. I want to have a look beyond that first."

The cliff of which he spoke was perhaps two or three miles from us, and it appeared to be a barrier of solid rock rising 100 feet or more above the surrounding masses of gray ledge. There was no knowing how

far it extended, as it curved away from us at both sides, but it was certainly of great extent. The top appeared to be level, or nearly so.

As we swept on towards this strange formation I noticed that it, as well as the surface of the rock beneath us, had a far different appearance from anything we had seen about the Andes so far. Up till now the mountain-top had seemed to be composed of gray, weather-beaten rock, and huge fields of ice, but now the cliff and all else in sight had a great resemblance to slag-iron.

"What is that stuff?" I asked of Frank.

"It looks like lava to me."

"It is lava," said Murray, with conviction.

"That is what I think myself," I replied, "and if it is, then there may be a volcanic crater somewhere about that cliff ahead of us."

"Even if there is it would not be the volcano White saw," said Murray.

"No; but White's volcano may not be the only one which has spit out diamonds."

Now, as we approached the cliff, we saw that the Condor would clear it by only thirty or forty feet, but, as there was noth-

ing showing beyond it, this was enough, so Frank did not attempt to bring the ship to a higher altitude. In a moment more we were sailing swiftly over the cliff and within a few feet of the surface.

We went along like this for perhaps ten or fifteen minutes, and at no moment during that time were we over twenty-five feet from the lava, when we suddenly shot out over a cliff and above a space of such frightful depth that we shrank from the sight in amazement.

It seemed to me that the world had suddenly dropped from beneath us, and for a few moments I had the breath-taking impression that it was still falling away from us into limitless space. It is one thing to rise slowly into the air from the earth, but it is altogether a different thing to be at one instant within a few feet of the ground and the next look down through twelve or fifteen thousand feet of space.

This immense well-like place was all of that in depth and it could not have been less than twenty-five or thirty miles in diameter. It was very nearly circular in form and the cliff, which was about of a height all the way around, was so nearly

perpendicular that no living thing which crawls or creeps could ever have mounted to the top in any place. Indeed, at a great many points the cliff overhung the frightful abyss.

As we neared the opposite side of this astonishing place Frank began steering the Condor so as to follow the curve of the cliff, and in this way we made the complete circuit of the crater, for it could be nothing else.

During this time we had said but little, for the gigantic pit was of such magnitude, the cliff so stupendous in its sheer drop from the sky to the bowels of the earth that no one could contemplate it without a feeling of wonder and awe, which made mere words futile.

As we began our second course about the lip of the crater Murray suddenly asked Frank what he was going to do.

"Descend."

"Go down there!" exclaimed Murray, gazing into the dizzy depths. "Do you know that those cliffs are unclimbable by any living thing?"

"There is no doubt of that."

"What do you suppose would become of

us if we went down there and something happened to the Condor?"

"As far as that goes, what would become of us if anything happened to her where we are?"

"You are right," replied Murray. "There is no reason why we should not descend if there is any object in doing so."

"Well," said Amos, "we've been lookin' for an extinct volcanic crater for some time, and it looks to me as if we had found one with a vengeance. If this ain't a crater th'n I'd like to know what it is."

"You are right, Amos," said Murray, "and I'm ready to go down when the rest are."

The bottom of this strange place appeared to be level, although we knew that such was not the case. That there was soil, and rich at that, was evident, because the greater part of the valley, or pit, was green with vegetation and much of it was wooded. There were several streams of some little size, which all had their source in the western part of the pit, and it was because of these streams that we knew the bottom of the place was not level. All of these water-courses came to the same destination, which was a small lake close under the eastern

cliff; so close, indeed, that the cliff formed one side of it.

To the south of the lake the ground seemed to be swampy, although we could tell little about it, as it was so heavily wooded as to form a tropical jungle. The outlet to the lake must have been through the cliff, at least we could discover no other.

In descending Frank did not shut off the power, but slowed to half speed and flew in wide circles, which brought us close to the cliff above the lake at every turn, while the rest of us kept a close watch upon the strange land for whatever might appear. We saw nothing alive.

"I don't believe that there is a living thing in the whole place," said Murray as we arrived at a distance of not over fifty feet from the ground.

"How should there be?" asked Frank. "How would anything get here unless it came as we have? Look at those cliffs."

He was perfectly right, and as we gazed in wonder at the towering barrier which surrounded this unheard-of country we realized that nothing but the most powerful bird or an airship could ever get here from the outside world. No rope long enough to

reach from the top to the bottom of that mighty cliff could support its own weight.

"How high do you suppose it is?" asked Murray, trying to estimate the distance by his eye.

"I should say that it was not less than twelve or fifteen thousand feet, and perhaps more," I replied.

"I call that good guessing," said Frank, "and I haven't seen you looking at the aneroid, either."

"I never thought of it, did you?"

"Yes; just before we reached the lip of the crater I noticed that the aneroid gave us a height of 18,000 feet above the sea, and now it says that we are only 4,000 above, so the cliff must be about 14,000 feet high."

"Well, whether it is or not, it is the most terrific sight I ever saw or ever expect to see," said Murray.

The land to the north of the lake was rocky and the soil thin and sandy. There was little growing here except a scanty growth of withered grass and a few scattering clumps of bushes. It was at this point that we brought the Condor to the ground.

It was now past noon and the first thing in order was dinner, after which Murray

and I, well armed, started out upon a trip of discovery, leaving Frank and Amos to guard the ship. The sun was nearly overhead, and down in this enclosed place the heat was great, and for this reason, as I suppose, we had seen no live thing, but as we passed a clump of bushes, on our way towards the shore of the lake, ten or twelve birds flew from under them. They were about the size of robins, but they were unlike any bird we had ever seen, being of a dark blue with a single long plume-like feather of a lighter shade growing from the crown of the head.

"Well," said Murray, in surprise, as we watched the handsome birds in their swift flight to the woods, "there are live things here after all, but how in the name of wonder did they get here?"

"You have asked the question, now answer it."

"Do you suppose it could be possible for them to fly here over that dizzy height?"

"I can't say, but I don't believe that any bird of that size ever lived that could do it."

"Then how did they get here?"

"It may be that there is a break in the cliff somewhere," I replied.



"Break nothing. Look about you." He waved his hand towards the stern horizon. "Where do you see any sign of a break in that unscalable rampart of solid rock? Take the glass and examine it foot by foot and in no place can you see the least break, and yet the crown of the cliff is visible against the sky every rod of the way around."

"I know it, nor have I seen a place even with the glass where the most agile climber in the world would stand the least chance of gaining a point within 10,000 feet of the top, but the birds may have surmounted the crest in flight for all of that."

"There can be no other explanation, but let's go on and see what we shall find about the lake shore."

Here there was white sand packed as hard as a floor with occasional out-croppings of water-worn rock. The water of the lake was sweet, but not at all cold, although that there were fish here we soon knew, for again and again we saw them leaping from its surface, while in the shallows, near the shore, there were schools of small fry which had the appearance of pike.

We walked along the shore towards the

cliff and soon started a small bird of the wading family, this was sure, although it was a stranger to us. It did not fly, but ran along the hard-packed sand at an amazing speed. As we turned from watching the bird we came upon a large ledge with an exposed flat side standing at an angle towards the lake, and here upon the smooth surface of the rock was the outline drawing of a monster.

## CHAPTER XI.

When I say that this drawing was of a monster I do not wish to convey the idea that the picture itself was of great size, for it was not, as the whole outline was inside of a space not over five feet square, and yet the drawing was that of a monster.

It was a piece of rough work and far from artistic, still there was a rude boldness and skill about the strongly drawn lines which told of much practice and no little aptitude on the part of whoever traced them.

Apparently it had been done with some sharp instrument like a piece of flint, or something of that nature. There was no attempt at a background or shading, but we had no difficulty in getting the artist's meaning.

The drawing represented an animal, or was it an animal? As I now think of what that drawing really represented I find that it is impossible for me to say whether it was an animal or a reptile. It may have been one and again it may have been both, but what I do know is that it was the most devilish beast that ever lived.

The body was very long for its height, the legs large and ending in great three-toed feet with a huge curved claw upon each toe. The hind legs were much the larger, and for that matter the hind quarters were so much larger than the fore as to make the beast out of proportion.

So far we have an animal, but the head, neck and tail were more reptilian than anything else. The neck was small for the body and quite long; the head large, flattened, and with a mouth which extended back nearly to the small ears, which were set so low as really to grow from the neck. From the upper jaw grew a pair of long, curved tusks extending beyond the lower. The nostrils were huge, thick and protruding. The artist had, by means of a large pupil and a straight upper lid, given the small eyes an expression of cold, savage ferocity.

The tail was rather short for the body, excessively large at the root, but tapering quickly to a small point. The picture gave the beast the appearance of having a skin much too large for the body, as there were folds in it about the neck and shoulders and also across the rump. The skin was hairless.

We had been so interested in, and surprised by, this drawing that we did not, for some moments, notice that there was anything else pictured upon the rock, but suddenly Murray pointed to an object placed just beyond the tip of the tail, which was undoubtedly the figure of a man. He was standing upright and holding what was probably meant for a spear in his hand. His head and face were covered by long hair, but with the exception of an apron-like girdle about his middle he was naked.

If the drawings were anywhere near proportional, then the beast was a monster indeed, for it was more than three times as high as the man was tall, and supposing the man to be five feet in height, then the animal, or whatever it was, had a length of certainly thirty feet.

"Well," asked Murray, with a swift glance about us, "what do you make of that?"

"There is one thing sure," I replied, "and that is that there are people of some kind in this wonderful place after all, and without doubt that is a fairly good drawing of their type."

"How old do you believe that drawing to be?" he asked.

"Not more than two or three months, if that."

"I guess you are right," he replied, as he examined the markings closely.

"That is rather soft stone and could not retain such light marks for long where rain falls as much as it must here by the looks of the country, and some of these lines appear positively fresh."

"You are overlooking the plainest signs," said I, pointing to the ground at the base of the rock. "If you will notice, you can see that the soil has been disturbed lately, and there by that overhanging shelf I think you will find a footprint of the artist."

He examined the marks in the sandy soil closely, and as he rose there was a puzzled expression on his face.

"If that track was made by the artist, then he is either a mighty small man or even woman, for that impression was made by a foot little larger than a child's."

"It may be that there was a child or small woman here with the artist."

"It doesn't make much difference how that was, but what do you make of that horrible beast?"

"It may be nothing but the wild imagination of the artist."

"I can't believe that, because if there are inhabitants here—and I am ready to admit that there must be—then they are primitive people, and quite primitive at that, for if they were not, we should have seen some indications of them long before this in the shape of buildings of some kind and tilled fields. I don't believe that a man who hasn't the ability to build a hut could ever have an imagination capable of seeing that, even in a nightmare.

"Then you believe the artist saw the beast before he drew it?"

"I believe he had seen such an animal or else a picture of one."

"But if he is a primitive man, how could he have seen a picture? Some one would have to make it in the first place."

"I don't know. But do you believe that such an animal as that is represented to be ever lived?"

"It may have, but it must have been in prehistoric times."

"In that case, what would a naked man living in an extinct volcano know of prehistoric monsters?"

"Nothing, as I can see, but what is the use of talking? We shall never learn the truth in that way. Let's do a little more exploring."

We followed the shore nearly to the cliff, but found nothing more of interest, so returned to the pictured rock and then on towards the western shore, where the small river entered the lake.

Here there was a heavy growth of reeds running far out into the water and thick bushes growing upon each bank of the stream. Further along began a large tract of heavy timber. In the moist soil near the river we ran on to the trail of an animal of the deer tribe, which left a track considerable larger than that of a sheep, and soon after started the animal itself.

We saw it but for a moment, as it quickly disappeared in the thick woods, but it was a deer of some kind, although strange to us. It was of about the size of a common red deer of northern New York, but otherwise there was not much resemblance, as it was the color of a buckskin horse, while its horns, instead of branching out into antlers, consisted of long, single spikes with a decided curve towards the shoulders.



We did not go far into the woodland, as we found a thick jungle of underbrush, through which ran hard trodden paths and trails made by the abundant life which we could no longer doubt belonged here. Returning to the open country by the shore of the lake, Murray and I stopped to consider our next move.

"Do you know," said he, with a suspicious glance at the woods we had just left, "that for the last half hour I have felt as though there were hundreds of eyes watching us?"

"I am feeling the same," I replied, "and I have no doubt that such is the case."

"I'm not going to blunder around in those woods again," said he with a slight shudder, "until I know more about the people to be found here than I do now. I can stand a fight, but I have no desire of getting a poisoned arrow or dart in my hide."

We at last decided to do a little exploring to the north and west of where the Condor lay, as the most of that country was either open or only sparsely wooded. Here among the scattering trees we found a rank growth of grass and many signs of animal life. Twice we started herds of the same kind of deer we had seen by the river. They quick-

ly disappeared, bounding away through the tall grass like antelopes. We made no attempt to shoot them.

"They seem rather wild," said Murray as we watched the last of them disappear in the woods.

"Which goes to prove that there are men here for they would not be so wild if they had not been hunted."

We found nothing more of much interest until we arrived at a point which lay nearly to the north of the Condor, when we came to a small tract of ground which showed the effect of a rude cultivation. It was thickly covered with plants, some four or five feet in height, which had huge, thick leaves of a vivid green. The main stalk was as thick as my arm and of a yellowish-brown. Where the great leaves, which were the only branches, left the stalk there hung a bunch of fruit which was unlike bananas and yet had a strong resemblance to them.

Birds were thick about this field, and as much of the fruit was partly eaten we had no hesitation in sampling it for ourselves. There was a great quantity of ripe fruit, which was of a dark red as to the skin, but the meat was of a very delicate pink. It

peeled like the banana, but the flavor was more like pineapple. It was luscious.

We returned to the Condor a little before sunset, where we found Frank and Amos awaiting our arrival with some anxiety, as we had not intended to be away so long.

That night we had a talk as to what we had better do. Frank, who was filled with curiosity about the picture on the rock, wished to visit it at once, but as it was long past sunset, he at last agreed to postpone his investigations until the next day.

We at first thought of ascending a few hundred feet to float through the night, but in the end decided to remain where we were unless something occurred to cause us to change our plans, when we could leave the ground in a very few minutes.

We passed the evening outside, as the night was warm and not so dark but that we could see quite distinctly for several rods. We sat without lights either in the ship or out, and nothing happened to disturb us until about ten o'clock. Once or twice we had heard the call of some animal or bird, it was hard to say which, as everything here was strange to us. The sounds seemed to come from the woods down near the river,

and being so far away we paid but little attention to them.

As it was my watch until midnight, the others were preparing to enter the ship with the intention of turning in, when Frank suddenly turned about and gazed out into the darkness towards the lake.

"It's no use, Frank," said Murray, with a chuckle, "you can't see that picture on the rock until—"

"Hark!" said Frank, holding up his hand.

For a few moments we listened in breathless silence, but heard nothing.

"What do you think you heard?" asked Murray, in a low tone.

"I don't know, but it sounded as though some heavy animal was walking in the water."

"Do you hear anything now?"

"No."

For a few moments we again listened, but there was no sound reached our ears other than the peaceful whisperings of the night, and I was about to speak when from the direction of the lake there came the strangest noise I ever heard. It was not loud, and the only thing I can think of with which to compare it is the baffled whine of a hound-

dog while it is casting about for a lost trail, but with this was mingled hoarse, swinish squeals of either rage or pain. Taken together, the sound was indescribably horrible.

After a few moments the strange sounds sank away into muffled grunts and slobbering splashes as though a gigantic hog chewed chunks of food in a troughful of swill, but this lasted only a minute or two, when silence again fell about us.

We stood by the door of the ship, straining our ears for some sign of approach from whatever had caused the noise, but for some little time we heard nothing, then, from a point midway between the ship and the shore, there came the crunch of gravel as from the step of a heavy animal, but, for the moment, this was all.

Murray began to speak in a low tone, when without further warning there rose a bellowing roar of such volume and power as to jar the air and shake the very ground beneath our feet. It was not like the bellow of a bull or the roar of a lion or any other animal I ever heard. It was more like the screaming roar of a steam foghorn animated by the rage and passion of a beast.

It began on a low tone with a guttural note in it, which was simply blood-chilling. From there it rose, tone by tone, into a quavering, nerve-racking cry that was even more terrible than the scream of a wounded horse.

Three times this deadful cry rose through the silent night, and then the great cliffs caught it up and hurled it back and forth with redoubled power until the air was rent and shattered by the infernal din. Thunderous roars and high, quavering screams tore the air to tatters about us until it seemed as though all the devils in hell were loose.

Then silence, so complete and deep that for perhaps a full minute I could hear nothing but the breathing of the others and the racing of my heart-beats.

At last there came the crunching rattle of gravel, a blowing snort like that of a frightened horse, only far more powerful, a curious muffled thud which jarred the earth, followed by another and still another, when we suddenly realized that it was caused by the huge leaps of the beast as it charged in the direction of the ship.

Then, from out the gloom of the night, there appeared a gigantic, shadowy blot of

still blacker darkness, which advanced with incredible swiftness by leaps and bounds of not less than thirty feet at a stride. There was no time to do anything. Before we could have got inside the ship the monster would have been upon us. We hardly realized it was in sight when it passed us with the speed of a cloud shadow.

We saw nothing distinctly enough to enable us to say what it really appeared like, except that it was huge, monstrous, more like a gigantic tripod than an animal. The soft, thudding jars of the huge leaps reached us more and more faintly until at last there was a rustling crash as the beast forced his way through the bushes at the edge of the woods. Again the quavering, frightful cry rose and echoed from cliff to cliff with a menacing clamor which curdled the blood, then again the pulsing silence of the night.

I am of the opinion that each of us believed that the beast was charging us. I know that I, for one, was amazed to find myself alive and unhurt when the beast had gone. It was some seconds before anyone spoke, and then Amos began swearing in a way that should have turned the air blue, and as he swore he choked and gagged until

he lost his breath from the excess of his emotions.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked in as severe a tone as I could command, but I will admit that it was not so firm as I should have preferred it to be.

"Matter!" he gasped. "Matter! Of all the damned, cussed—"

"Stop it!" I rasped. "Pull yourself together and shut up."

"I don't blame him for being sick," said Murray. "I'm sick myself. Name of a name, as the French say, what in the name of the devil was it, anyway?"

"It was the beast of the pictured rock," I replied.

"There is no doubt of that, but what do you call it? What is the name of the thing?"

"How should I know? All that I can say is that it has all the earmarks of a prehistoric monster."

"You are probably right about that," said Frank, "and I shall not be the least surprised if we find that this place contains nothing of this age. We have seen a number of animals and a good many birds since



we have been here, but have you seen one thing you could name?"

"No."

"Well, you won't."

"It would make no difference to me," said Amos, "whether I had ever seen any of these dumned things or not. I've seen enough already, an' if I had my say-so, this 'ere ship would take to th' air blamed quick."

"I hardly think," said Frank, "that there is any danger in remaining where we are for now. In my opinion that beast spends the most of his time in or about the water. You know that was where he was when we first heard him, and as like as not he had no intention of harming us anyway, and I don't believe he even knew we were here at all."

In this we found that we were agreed, with the exception of Amos, so there was nothing more said about leaving, which was as well, for the rest of the night passed without further alarm.

## CHAPTER XII.

The next morning Frank and I, heavily armed, set out for the lake shore to give him a chance to see the drawing on the rock.

"There is no use talking," said he after he had viewed it, "this is a picture of the animal we saw last night and it is either a prehistoric beast, or a freak.

"Do you suppose," I asked, "that there may be such a thing as a huge cavern under the cliff into which the outlet from this lake flows and where there may be a steady heat from some internal source which would through the action of chemical fumes, cause enormous growth to animal life?"

"I have never heard of such a thing, but there may be something in it for all that," he replied, gazing across the shimmering lake to where the water lapped the rock in the black shadow of the mighty cliff.

"Well, argument or speculation will do no good, so we might as well be moving. Where do you want to go next?"

"What do you say to following the trail of that beast?"

"It may be a risky job, but I'm with you if you care to try it."

"It was easy to find the trail, as those great feet had sunk far into the sandy soil. The tracks were plainly marked in places and the impressions were made by three-toed feet, each toe being armed with a large claw.

We followed the back track first, but this led us at once to the lake and but a few rods from the rock which held the drawing. From here we went back to where it had passed the Condor and, only stopping long enough to tell Murray where we were going, we started out upon the strangest trail, I believe man ever followed.

All the way from where the beast had stood when it uttered its terrible cry to where it entered the woods the mode of locomotion had been by leaps which, in many cases, had carried it thirty feet at a stride. It had crashed through the bushes at the edge of the forest, smashing everything in its path, until it reached a small, open glade, where it had slowed to a walk. This meadow-like opening was not of great extent and the trail soon entered the woods again.

We followed on through the cool twilight of the thick forest until we came out into still another open space, and here we started a herd of not less than fifty of the buff-colored deer. They quickly fled in headlong haste, except one, which dropped at the crack of Frank's rifle. He was a beautiful animal, with grace in every limb, but he was also sleek and fat and we needed fresh meat.

After bleeding the buck we went on, leaving him where he fell, as we could recover the carcass later by means of the Condor. The trail again led us into the woods, where we followed it for some little time when we came to yet another open space of considerable size. We could see by the trampled grass that the beast had passed straight across the opening and into the woods beyond. We stood at the edge of the glade trying to decide whether we should follow the trail further or not when suddenly there broke out a wild commotion of shrill cries and screams from the woods at the opposite side of the clearing. These cries of pain or fright held a human note.

As we stood staring in wonder a small, naked man came running from the woods, followed in a moment more by eighteen or

twenty others, all of whom seemed to be in the wildest terror of something behind them. The moment they gained the clearing they separated and ran in all directions, but before the fleetest of them had advanced far there came crashing from the woodland the monster of a nightmare.

It was of gigantic size, but what made me sick with abhorrence was its amazing agility together with a serpentine suppleness of movement, which gave one the impression that it was boneless, or that if it did have bones they were limber. This frightful suppleness of body and limbs, taken in conjunction with its color, which was of a shimmering brown shaded to a dull yellow along its breast and belly, gave one a feeling of dazed horror.

It was impossible to say whether the beast was an animal or a reptile.

Among the little people, for they were all small, who fled from this brute was a group of four who were running nearly in our direction, and of these one, who held an infant close against her side, was a female. It was these that the leaping horror had apparently marked down as his prey. They were rapidly being overtaken.

One of the men held a spear, and in sudden despair he whirled about and cast it with all his strength. It went true to its mark, striking the beast fairly in the breast, but it was useless, as the puny weapon glanced from the scaly hide as a drop of water does from a rubber coat. It was like throwing straws at a grizzly bear.

It was the poor devil's last act, for before he could so much as turn to run the monster seized him about the middle with a snake-like swoop of the huge head, and holding him high in the air, shook him as a terrier does a rat and then cast the shapeless, bloody mass far to one side and again sprang in pursuit of the others.

I watched this awful sight in cold-blooded horror, and I have no idea how long I should have remained in that dazed state if I had not been aroused by the report of Frank's rifle. This brought me to my senses at once, and bringing my own weapon to my shoulder I fired as fast as I could work the lever.

I aimed at the brute's head, as I suppose did Frank, and I am sure that the most of our bullets struck the mark, and yet we could not see that they had the least effect

except to turn the attention of the beast from the natives to us. We fired as fast as we could, being sure of our aim, as the frightful beast came leaping towards us, but it seemed to me that we might as well have blown putty-balls through a tin tube. As the devilish thing drew near Frank cried out:

“Run for the timber!” and, firing a parting shot, set the example by sprinting for the woods at his best speed.

I was cold with fear, and yet I believed that we should be able to escape by dodging the huge brute among the thick timber, but in this I soon found that I was very much mistaken. That gigantic brute was possessed of such frightful strength and agility that he was able to hunt us down with nearly as much speed in the woods as he had shown in the open.

I soon lost sight of Frank, but, as I believed him safe, this did not bother me nearly so much as it did to discover the fact that it was I that the beast was following with a doggedness and persistency which I soon realized I was unable to overcome. I turned and dodged about from tree to tree in a vain effort to get beyond his sight, but

all that I could do was barely to keep beyond his reach. Once I tripped over a root and fell headlong, and the only thing that saved me was that in his eagerness to reach me he struck his shoulder against a tree with such violence as to cause him to miss his aim.

It was while he was following me with such blood-chilling ferocity that he began the strange, eager whine of baffled rage, and there was something about this squealing bloodthirstiness that struck terror to my soul. My lungs began to labor in the still, hot air, my knees wobbled and nearly failed me as I ran and dodged, yet I struggled on and still clung to my empty gun.

Suddenly I found myself at the edge of the woods. In my turning and twisting I had lost all sense of direction and had been driven towards the clearing and also, as I really believed, to a quick but horrible death. If I was once forced away from the woods I should be overtaken in a breath. In despair I glanced wildly about for some chance to reach again the poor shelter which the woods afforded when I saw a group of large trees growing upon the extreme edge of the forest, which stood so closely together



that I believed the beast would not be able to force his way between them.

Exerting the little strength I had left, I rushed for the friendly cover and plunged headlong between the great trunks and hurriedly made myself as small as I could. In an instant more the great serpent-like head was thrust through the opening, while the huge shoulders of the gigantic brute were forced against the sturdy trees with a strength which jarred them to the topmost branches, but in spite of the horrible stretching of the rubber-like neck he could not reach me.

Even then he did not desist, but retreated, and still whining and squealing with rage began circling the trees to thrust his head in first at one point and then another, his little eyes blazing, his great jaws champing and clashing together within a foot of my curled-up limbs, but, as he could not get any part of himself, except the head and neck, between the trees at any point, I was able, by shifting my position as he shifted his point of attack, to keep beyond his reach.

When I was sure of this I set about reloading the magazine of my gun. It took some time to do it, as I had to do so much

dodging about, but at last I succeeded in partly filling the gun, when, placing the muzzle within a foot of the huge, pink mouth, I fired into the cavernous gullet. Smoke poured from his mouth and nostrils, but the bullet did not even stagger him. Again and again I shot into that dreadful maw, the blood ran in red streams from the huge jowls, yet he whined and screamed in a rage that was diabolical in its fierceness as he heaved and strained against the friendly trees.

Up till now I had not seen Frank since we entered the woods, but I had heard the report of his gun a number of times, so I knew he was doing his best to save me, but at this moment I caught sight of him peering from behind a tree, and as he got my eye he opened his mouth and pointing at its roof made the motion of shooting.

He was obliged to use signs to convey his meaning, as the frightful cries of the monster made it impossible for me to hear, but I understood his idea at once, which was to shoot the beast in the brain through the roof of his mouth.

This was not an easy thing to do, as the head was not still for a moment, but at last

I succeeded in placing a couple of bullets where they would do the most good, and in a moment more saw that these, at least, had taken effect. The noise of his whining suddenly stopped, and in a moment more the mortally wounded brute drew his head from between the trees and rushed away into the open.

The instant he was clear of the woods he began jumping into the air like a cat in a fit, and it was perfectly amazing to see so huge an animal spring to the height he did. Each time he struck the ground he tore out great clods of earth and sod by the sheer power of his terrible three-toed feet, and what made the frightful exhibition of diabolical strength and agility all the more horrible was that it was all done in silence. No sound, except his heavy breathing, escaped from that bleeding, foaming mouth.

At last he began to weaken; no longer could he raise his huge weight from the ground, and now instead of leaping in his agony he began staggering about; his great head swaying from side to side while the bloody froth ran and splashed the trampled grass before him. Twice he swayed to his knee, but with a mighty effort regained his

feet and staggered on. It seemed as though he would never die, but at last he slowly squatted upon his great haunches, and as I watched him in fascinated horror I saw the loose skin on his back crawl and ripple up and down as though the skin itself was a gigantic serpent.

With that awful skin still crawling in undulating folds the dying beast rose slowly upon his hind feet, and stretching his huge bulk to a prodigious height stood swaying like an undermined tower for a moment and then fell, as a tower falls, with a force that shook the ground.

The great legs straightened; the huge tail rose and lashed frightful blows from side to side; the mighty flanks contracted as the lungs made a vain effort to fill with air; the whole gigantic mass shook and quivered; the black blood poured from the gasping maw, and with one long, convulsive shudder the frightful brute gave up its life.

I staggered from my place of refuge so sick and weak that I could hardly keep my feet. Frank came from the woods, his face white and drawn from the horror of our terrible battle.

"Of all the cursed things that ever lived,"

said he, in a shaking voice, "that horror was the limit. Thank heaven, he's dead at last, and all I hope and pray is that he was the only one in existence."

"There may be plenty more just like it in this outlandish place," I replied as I dropped to the ground, for I was yet too weak to stand.

"Let us hope not, but if there is any reason to believe that there are more of them, let's get back to the ship and leave the place as soon as we can get under way."

"Don't you want to learn more about the little people we saw?" I asked as I began filling the magazine of my rifle.

"Little people. By thunder, I had completely forgotten them!" he exclaimed with a quick look about us as he examined his gun.

"Where did they go?" I asked, as I rose to my feet with a groan.

"I don't know. But are you hurt?" in a voice of concern.

"No; not in the least. I shall be all right as soon as I get my wind and a little strength, but I feel as though I had been pounded with a club."

We saw nothing more of the natives, and

after a short rest started for the ship. We neither of us went near the dead beast, and for my part, although I knew it to be as dead as a hammer, I would not have gone near it for a thousand dollars. It gave me the willies."

We kept a sharp watch for whatever dangers might appear on our return trip, but we neither saw nor heard anything alarming and soon came in sight of the ship, and a welcome sight it was, too.

## CHAPTER XIII.

We found Murray and Amos in rather a nervous state, as they had heard the firing and were sure we had run into trouble of some kind. In fact, Murray said that if we had not appeared about when we did he should have gone in search of us with the Condor.

As it was, we got under way and went after the deer, which we found where we left it. We saw other deer in large numbers, but nothing of the little people. After recovering the carcass of the buck we flew over the woods to the opening where we had battled with the monster and saw the huge body, but we did not land. Then we returned to our starting point, where we again descended and anchored. We had decided to stay until the next day, at least.

The next morning as we were eating breakfast Murray began again discussing the question of whether or not we should leave the strange pit without trying to discover what it might contain of further interest. Neither Frank or I felt any great desire to remain longer, and as for Amos

he wished to leave the place at once. But Murray was determined to stay where we were until we knew far more about the country and what was to be found in it.

He was trying to argue the question and gobble his breakfast at the same time when he suddenly dropped his fork and stared over my shoulder at the window behind me with an expression of astonishment upon his face.

"What do you see?" I asked as I turned to the window.

There was no need for him to answer, as what he had seen was plainly in view.

At a distance of eight or ten rods from the Condor was a low knoll bare of growth. Upon this stood a group of perhaps 200 little people such as Frank and I had seen the day before. They were staring at the Condor, but there was nothing hostile in their actions.

"What do you suppose they want?" asked Frank as we rose from the table.

"They mean no harm to us," said Murray, "and I would stake my life on it."

"That is my opinion also," said I, "but it will be best to have our arms ready for all that."



"I believe we shall be far more likely to frighten them away if we all go outside with guns in our hands than they are to do us harm," said Murray. "If they see we are armed they won't come near us."

"Who wants 'em to come nigh us?" asked Amos.

"I do," said Murray, "and if you fellows will keep tabs on them from here I will go out and speak to them."

"A fat lot of good that would do," laughed Frank. "They wouldn't know whether you were trying to charm them for their rent."

"Don't you worry about your Uncle Samuel," replied Murray as he buckled on his automatic. "I can talk to them, and you'll notice it when I get started. All you chumps have to do is to get out a bale of that trade stuff. I want a lot of those high colored handkerchiefs and a few strings of beads."

These things were quickly produced, and, leaving his rifle in the ship, Murray stepped from the door. The moment he appeared the natives began talking among themselves, but they remained on the knoll watching Murray's every motion.

He walked slowly towards them until he was perhaps fifty feet from the Condor

when he stopped and held his hands above his head, the palms towards them to show that they were empty.

This had no effect upon the natives, so he began a series of polite motions which would have done credit to a French dancing master, and at last pulled out one of the bright colored handkerchiefs and waved it before their eyes.

The only effect this seemed to have on them was to cause them to gesticulate and jabber in excitement and to watch Murray all the closer. Some of them were armed with long, slender spears, but they did not act in the least hostile. In fact, to judge by their actions, their feelings towards us seemed to be governed more by fear and curiosity than by anything else.

At last Murray began walking towards them, his every motion expressive of good will, but before he had covered one-half the distance they had become so nervous and fearful that it looked as though the next move would be a stampede. He saw this as quickly as we and instantly stopped, with his hands extended in welcome, but as they showed no desire for a closer view of him

he threw down the handkerchief and returned to his first position.

For some little time they stood thickly crowded together, evidently discussing the bright object, and at last four of the armed men began slowly advancing towards it, but it was easy to see that they were so fearful that a slight movement by Murray would send them flying.

At last they came near enough to the handkerchief to prod it with their long spears, and as soon as they were convinced of its utter harmlessness one of them got it on the point of his spear and returned in triumph. As he approached the eagerly watching natives an old man with long, gray hair stepped in front of the trophy-bearer, took the handkerchief from the spear, and after a careful examination fastened it about his waist and began strutting up and down before his admiring audience.

Murray now began another careful approach, holding out a string of beads as well as more handkerchiefs as an inducement to them to forget their fears. They allowed him to get within a few feet of them this time before showing signs of flight, and when they did begin to retreat he stopped

at once and by every means in his power tried to convince them that he meant them no harm.

He was within reach of their spears, and I was wondering what would be the outcome of this adventure if they did mean mischief when the old man, the one who wore the handkerchief, slowly left the others and prostrated himself before Murray.

Murray, who was certainly a foot and a half taller than the old native, lifted him to his feet and hung a string of beads about his neck. Then he took him by the hand shook it with every indication of the greatest delight, saying in perfectly good English and in a tone which reached our ears:

"How do you do, sir? I hope that I find you well and happy, sir, and I hope that your family are enjoying the best of health."

"Hear that numbskull talkin' English to a cross between a monkey and a pair o' dividers!" said Amos with a broad grin.

The little native hardly knew whether to be frightened to death by this treatment or not, but, as he still lived, he must have concluded that Murray was some kind of a god or at least a giant who had no desire to eat

him. As soon as his hand was released he carefully examined it and then began shaking hands with his own people as though he had at last found the true occupation of life.

I believe that they had not known of this custom until now, and it seemed to be just what they had been looking for. In three minutes they were all shaking hands with all the delight of long separated friends, while Murray went among them, laughing, talking and shaking every hand he could get hold of, and at last came marching in triumph to the Condor, followed by the whole strange-appearing tribe.

Amos was not far out of the way when he spoke of them as a cross between a monkey and a pair of dividers, as many of them certainly had a strong resemblance to apes, while they were all of them lightly built, with rather long, slender legs. The tallest one in the lot, the old fellow with the gray hair, who seemed to be their chief or king, was not over four and a half feet in height while many of the adult men were scarcely four feet tall. The full-grown women, some of whom were really rather pretty and in many cases nicely formed, were even

shorter than the men. All of them had rather expressive dark-brown eyes, and they were a pleasant-natured race, very apt to play tricks upon each other, which I believe is also a characteristic of the monkey family.

But they were not monkeys by any means, as they had a language of a far greater vocabulary than any tribe of monkeys or apes ever produced, and besides that they understood the use of fire. They also wore what I suppose would come under the head of clothing, although I was never able to say whether this was worn as clothing or as a mark of distinction and ornament.

In no case did it consist of more than a narrow girdle about the waist with short flaps hanging either from the front or rear, and in some cases from both. The girdles were not always of the same material, nor were the apron-like flaps, as some were of woven grass while others were made of the skins of animals, and in a few cases of feathers, beautifully woven.

None of the children or even the young men and girls wore these girdles and not all of the adults, but those who wore nothing showed no more signs of embarrass-

ment than those who wore the most elaborate aprons. For this reason I believe the things were not considered as clothing by them.

They soon lost the greater part of their sense of fear of us, as they quickly learned that we were friendly, which they could hardly help doing, as we did nothing to alarm them and also plied them with presents of bright-colored cloth and beads. Among the stuff we gave them were a few small mirrors, such as are given away on account of the advertisement on the back. These were a source of the wildest delight as well as the greatest wonder on the part of the natives.

To the chief, or king, Murray gave a hunting-knife with its shield, and the old fellow's gratification was something to wonder at, but then he realized its worth, as he had never owned anything better than a piece of flint as a cutting weapon until that moment.

We undertook to find out from them if there were other monsters like the one Frank and I had killed in the pit, but from all we could understand from their motions we knew as much as before.

They hung around the Condor until nearly nightfall while others joined them from time to time, and in nearly every case the newcomers brought us presents of fruit, meat or fish until we were furnished with so abundant a supply that there was no need of our looking for more for days to come.

Some little time before sunset the king marshaled his flock and, with many strange motions of farewell, led them away into the forest, and we saw them no more that night.



## CHAPTER XIV.

We kept a strict watch, but the night passed without alarm. Nothing was seen or heard larger than the spike-horned deer, which seemed to be so plentiful in this queer land. Before we were done with our breakfast the little people came trooping from the forest in droves, and many of them brought some offering.

We went outside to welcome our visitors and Murray took the lead in this, shaking hands with all he could reach, but it was to the king that he showed the most attention. He even went so far as to get him to visit the interior of the Condor, a place where none of them had been so far and none of them had shown any desire to be, either.

The king himself tried his best to decline the honor, but Murray would not be denied, and after much palaver and reassuring language, of which the frightened monarch understood nothing, he was at last induced to enter what, to his mind, might be his tomb, but he soon lost his fear in wonder at the strange things he saw, heard and

tasted, for I am bound to say that Murray did the thing up brown in the end.

When the sights of the ship had become exhausted, Murray conducted the king back to the dining-room and attempted to seat him in a chair, but this was a little too much for the ruler of an extinct volcano to put up with, and the best he could be made to do was to seat himself on the floor by the side of the chair he had refused.

I suppose that what he had seen since he entered the door had been more than he had ever imagined in his life in the way of surprising sights, but he now proceeded to even things up by giving us a surprise which he could not have surpassed if he had spent his life in planning it.

He was no more than seated when he took a small package from his girdle and handed it to Murray. It was a rag of deer-skin, which by its appearance had been in use for years. As Murray unfolded it there dropped out an object which caused both of us to examine it with the greatest of care and interest. It was about two inches long by perhaps an inch and a half in breadth and thickness. The instant we examined it closely we knew what it was. and the reali-

zation of what it meant nearly took our breath.

"What is it?" asked Frank, as he leaned over my arm to get a better view of the object.

"It is a diamond, and one of the finest I ever saw," I replied.

"A diamond! Are you sure? It looks, to me, like nothing but a piece of glass."

"It's not glass," said I. "It's a diamond, and a very large and fine one at that. I have seen too many of them to be mistaken."

"Of course it's a diamond," said Murray. "I have seen any amount of them in the natural state, but I'll admit that I never saw one so large as this before."

"As you will observe," said I, holding the stone in the strong light by the open door, "this diamond has three cleavage planes which allow us to ascertain its condition with far greater ease, and, as you can see, the stone is remarkable for its clearness and flawless state, for it is as limpid as water and without spot or blemish in any place."

"And that is a diamond!" breathed Frank, as I passed the stone back to Murray.

"How much would that diamond be worth in New York?" asked Amos.

"I can't say, as I have no way of finding its weight."

"How do they sell diamonds, by th' ton or by th' pound?" he asked, with a grin.

"Not either, but sometimes by the carat."

"Well, how many carat would this one weigh, just for a guess?"

"It's a hard matter to guess with any certainty, but I should say it would weigh not less than 400 carats. It may go five."

"Well, how much a carat?"

"I couldn't say as to that either, but I have been told that cut diamonds of the first water, and flawless, sell for \$1,500 a carat."

"Jumping beeswax!" he cried, staring at me in astonishment. "Fifteen hundred dollars a carat, an' you say this one will weigh four or five hundred!"

"Yes, but you must remember that perhaps a half of it will be wasted in the cutting. Say that it weighed 200 carats when cut. Even at that it would be valued at \$300,000."

"Well, all I've got to say is that it beats

my time, but let's search every one of these little apes. They may be loaded with 'm."

"We don't want to do that, but if they have them we can trade for them, or if they haven't any, find out where this one comes from, for there are more in the same locality."

"Let me arrange this thing," said Murray.

With a string of beads in one hand and the diamond in the other he offered the king his choice, and he instantly chose the beads. Then Murray began a sign talk by which he at last made the king understand that we would give beads or other desirable things for every stone of this kind he could bring us, and the moment the old fellow got this through his head he sprang to the door and began jabbering to his subjects with an animation that soon brought results.

The amazing thing about it was that they, in their naked poverty, had brought us so many diamonds that they really amounted to untold wealth. There were over 200 of them, though to be sure, some of them were of no value, but out of the lot we sorted 156 which were nearly perfect. They ran from

the size of a bean to that of a walnut, but there were none so large as the king first showed us. They certainly were an exhilarating lot to look upon.

The natives, who had no use for them, were as pleased to get the glass beads and other things as we were to get the diamonds. We did not feel we were robbing them, as what we gave in exchange was of far more value to them. They had nothing to represent money, and I hardly think they really understood the meaning of barter. They were not intelligent, only a little more so than monkeys. I do not believe that their vocabulary contained over 100 words, and it was utterly impossible for them to count any number above three, and I was never sure that they understood how to do that.

As nearly as we could learn from them, we came to the conclusion that the lower part of the pit, where the lake lay, was seldom visited by the natives, for the reason that it was here they were the most likely to come in contact with the huge beast which Frank and I had killed, or others like it, for, as I have said, they did not seem to know whether there were more than one or not.

The next day Murray and I went with the

king, and two or three hundreds of his subjects as an escort, to that part of the pit in which the natives had their homes. These consisted of nothing but natural caves in a great spur of lava-like rock adjacent to the northern cliff, and something like five or six miles from where the Condor lay.

We did not explore the caves to any extent, but from what I saw of them I should say that they were far more ample than would have been necessary to accommodate twice as many people as there were here. How many of these little people there were I am unable to say, but I believe there were two or three thousand of them, at least.

For some reason the birth rate must have been small, as we saw but few babies or children, but what there were seemed to have good care and they appeared bright and healthy, but, with the exception of the very small children, it was impossible for us to say to what particular native a child belonged, and then we could tell only the mother, as there seemed to be no such thing as family life known to them, except as they all belonged to one great household.

They were a sociable lot, always jabber-

ing away about something, and I never saw one of them, male or female, alone.

A short distance from the caves there were a number of hot-springs strongly impregnated with sulphur, while near these were jets of natural gas which had been fired by lightning, or some other means. The old king gave us to understand that they had been burning forever, which I suppose meant so far as he knew. It was from these flaming jets of gas that they had learned the power of fire.

The springs, as well as the burning gas-jets, were on a high shelf of sandstone, but of a peculiar formation. It was badly honeycombed with small pits that seemed to lead right down to the center of the earth. It was from these that the boiling water and flame came.

Below this shelf, and cut into deep grooves and gullies by the water from the springs—and there were cold springs as well as hot—was a great bed of blue clay. Here it was that the natives found the diamonds. Many of them were washed out by the water and could be had for the picking up, while at no place was it necessary to dig for long to find them.



A good many of the diamonds were off color from the action of the hot sulphur-impregnated water, but we had little trouble in finding enough which were perfect to satisfy our every desire for wealth.

Of course, we did not accomplish all this in one day. Instead, we made a good many trips to the clay beds, and always afoot, as there was no place to land the ship, and we always returned to the Condor for the night. Either Frank, Murray or myself remained in the near vicinity of the ship through the day.

The diamonds were so plentiful and so easily procured that a few weeks' labor left nothing to be desired so far as wealth was concerned, if the stones could be placed on the market at ruling prices, for we had taken away an enormous quantity and yet had not exhausted the beds by any means.

In this respect the expedition had proven to be far more of a success than we had dared to hope for in our most sanguine moments, and yet it came very near being a disaster with such frightful results that I have never been able to drive the horror of it from my mind.

We had become millionaires many times

over, or should be if the stones were converted into cash, so we decided to dig no longer, but get away upon the return voyage for home. In fact, we had made our last trip to the clay-beds and were spending the last day we expected to be in the pit in filling the tanks with fresh water, laying in a stock of fresh fruit and meat, and in doing whatever else was necessary, as we intended to start as soon as we could get ready.

Frank had proposed the idea of getting a few fish from the lake for our larder, as there was one kind to be taken there which was most excellent for the table, and Murray and I had volunteered as fishermen. Amos had gone to the field where the banana-like fruit grew to gather a few choice bunches to take with us. This left no one near the ship except Frank. We had done the same thing many times before.

We fished from the shore and not far from the pictured rock. We had been at it for some little time and with such good success that I was about to propose a return to the ship, when I noticed that Murray was frowningly watching something on the opposite side of the lake.

"What do you see?" I asked, as I also

scanned the low shore with its thick growth of reeds and water-plants.

"There is something on the mud-bank among those reeds," he replied in a low voice.

Even as he spoke I saw a movement of the tropical growth, which I realized could only have been made by a large animal, and the next moment a huge snout poked its way through the reeds, and with a shudder of horror I again gazed with loathing upon such another monster as Frank and I battled with.

It seemed to me that this beast was even larger than the other one, and as we were not over twenty rods from him, and plainly in view, with no weapons about us except our pistols, I will admit that I began to think of the ship as a much safer place than where we stood upon the naked shore.

But, even as I thought of saying something to Murray about a retreat, I saw that the huge brute was paying no attention to us. I hardly think he had seen us at all. His attention was all directed towards the shore near where the river entered the lake.

At first we could see nothing here but the thick-growing, semi-tropical vegetation, but

not for long, as there soon appeared another huge monster, but, as he was swimming, there was little to be seen of him except the great snakelike head and neck and the shimmering back. He swam directly to the submerged bank, where the other awaited his approach, and soon reached water so shallow that his huge bulk loomed in the air with fully the size of the other.

They were now some four or five rods apart, and for the moment neither advanced. They stood facing each other, their great heads, which swayed from side to side, lowered to within a few feet of the water, while the massive, crocodile-like tails lashed about like mighty serpents.

"Is it love or a fight?" asked Murray in a hoarse whisper.

"A fight, I think."

"If it is it will be the strangest thing of the kind that man has ever witnessed since the stone age."

"They may not fight, but it looks like it."

At this moment the gigantic brutes began slowly moving towards each other, their huge jaws working with a horrible grinding, champing motion, while the rasping jar of their clashing tusks reached to where we

stood staring in amazement at the preliminaries to the battle of the giants.

And now there reached our ears the outlandish, blood-thrilling, eager whining of which I have already spoken, and with both of them rending the air with this horrible sound there was nothing more needed to drive a timid person to insanity. The appearance of these frightful beasts was bad enough, but their unearthly screams of rage and eagerness to be at each other's throats were worse.

When they had come to within twenty or twenty-five feet of each other they both stopped and began a curious sidling movement that caused them to circle about in what was apparently an effort to gain an advantageous opening, but they only succeeding in still facing each other at every turn.

Suddenly they stopped the outflanking movement, drew back upon their massive haunches, their mighty muscles gathered for the combat, and sprang for each other's throats. I heard Murray gasp with astonishment as he saw this exhibition of agility in beasts of such gigantic size, and it amazed even me, who had seen something of the

terrible power these brutes possessed.

It was not their wonderful strength that amazed one, for this was natural in animals of such great size, but because of that size the frightful agility displayed was a thing to shudder at. Their movements were so rapid, their every turn and leap so swift, the supple speed of each thrust of those mighty heads so like the supple swiftness of striking serpents that it was impossible to follow their mode of battle with the eye, but it seemed to me that each was trying to get his adversary by the throat, and neither succeeded.

The water was churned to a foam and the flying spray hid them from our sight a good part of the time, but, aside from the noise of the splashing, the battle was fought in silence. From the first leap neither of the brutes had uttered a sound. They now fought with the savage silence of bulldogs.

As we stood in tense excitement watching this fearful combat there came to our ears a cry in Frank's voice, which was so full of alarm, concern and even fear that we could do nothing but gaze at each other in the deepest apprehension. Then, as the cry was repeated, we threw down our tackle

and ran with all the speed we were capable of in the direction of the ship, for it was from there that the cry seemed to come.

From the shore of the lake the ground rose at quite a stiff angle for a distance of about five or six rods, but from the top of the rise the greater part of the open land about the Condor was plainly in sight, and the moment we topped this rise we knew what it was that had so alarmed Frank. I did not know what Murray thought, but as for myself I more than half expected to see one or more of the great monsters demolishing the Condor. Nothing of that kind met our eyes.

Frank, whom we saw at once, was between us and the ship, and he was running towards it as I never saw anyone run before. Amos, loaded with fruit, was plodding across the sandy plain from the direction of the field where it grew, while a few rods from the Condor stood a group of the natives. There might have been fifty or sixty of them and they were all staring at the ship.

All this we saw at once, and for the fraction of a second I felt that there was nothing to be alarmed about, but the next in-

stant I saw what I believed to be ruin so complete that my heart sank in despair. Murray, who saw it even as I did, cried in a choked voice as he raised his hand and pointed a shaking finger.

"The ship, Jack! The ship! Look, it is going up! Damn those little devils, they've turned the switch!"

It was true. The Condor was rising. She lay broadside towards us, and even as Murray cried out was at least twenty feet from the ground and rising rapidly. The door was open, and about it, just inside the ship, were clustered six or eight of the small natives. They seemed too frightened to move. From where we were I could see no use in Frank's running, for the ship was far out of reach, while he was yet fifty feet from where she had lain.

It seemed to me that he had been made suddenly insane by the calamity so swiftly cast upon us, for he ran as though the very devil was in his heels, and it was not until he reached a position nearly beneath the ship that I saw what it was he struggled to do.

Hanging from the open door with its swaying length clear from the ground dan-



gled a rope. At that moment I had no idea why the rope was there or how it came there. It was an inch line and one we had used in anchoring the ship. I knew that Frank was intending to get in the anchor lines while Murray and I fished; that he had done so, and that while his attention had been directed to the cries of the monsters some of the little natives had entered the Condor and accidentally moved the gas-switch, was apparently what had happened.

However it came there, it was this rope that Frank was after, and as he raced below the swaying end he leaped with all the force his mad rush and wiry muscles could give him, but so nearly was it out of his reach he barely caught it with one hand. His weight, suddenly brought to bear upon the ascending ship, checked its course for the moment and even lowered it by a few feet, but the intruding gas quickly overcame the downward drag, and in a moment he was lifted from the ground and carried away, swaying like a pendulum, some thirty or more feet below the swiftly rising Condor.

There now began the most desperate fight for existence I have ever witnessed. He was rather light in weight and his muscles were

like whipcord, but the only way by which he could save himself from a frightful death was to climb thirty feet of inch line, hand over hand, and before he could accomplish one-half the distance he swung, like a spider on its web, hundreds of feet above the earth, and every moment the bouyant ship rose swiftly higher into the clear blue of the calm sky.

We stared at this nerve-sapping sight in a state of mind that was little less than the insanity of excitement, through our fear for Frank and the absolute impossibility of our rendering him aid. Again and again I heard Murray groan in agony while the great drops of sweat rolled down and dripped from his white face as he watched Frank hanging, motionless and apparently exhausted, far below the deck of the ship, which he must reach or die.

Then, as the doll-like figure again struggled on he would raise his clenched hands on high, his muscles tense and quivering, as though he would send his strength streaming up through the still air to help our comrade in his desperate struggle for his life and our salvation.

It was while we waited in strained sus-

pense that my attention was called to a strange sound of yells, sobs, wild cries and commands, which at first I could hardly account for until I saw that all these outlandish sounds came from Amos. He had dropped his load of fruit and was standing, or rather hopping about, some eight or ten rods from where we stood. His arms were extended above his head, his gray hair hung about his distorted face, and with every breath he drew he shouted like a maniac, although I do not suppose that Frank heard even the sound of his voice.

He gave commands in the sternest of tones, plead for another effort in a voice which brought tears to my eyes, and threats in the tones of a bull. I know that he meant it all for encouragement, which would have been right enough if Frank could have heard it, but by this time the Condor was at such a dizzy height that it was but a blot in the sky, with a black dot below it to show that the brave boy still hung to the invisible thread which supported him.

Up till now the ship had ascended with very little drift, as there wasn't a breath of wind stirring at the bottom of the pit, but at the height it had now attained there was a

breeze, for the Condor began drifting away to the west, and soon became so distant that we could no longer be certain as to whether Frank was still clinging to the rope or not, although the ship itself was still in sight.

Murray gave a groan as he turned to me, his face twisted with anguish, and asked in a voice which I should never have known as his:

"Is he lost, Jack? Do you believe he is still holding to that rope?"

"If he isn't, then he must have lost his grip within the last minute or two, for I could see him no longer ago than that."

"What a frightful way to die! My God! I cannot believe he has lost his hold. We should have seen him fall."

Amos now came stumbling to where we stood, his rugged face as gray as a stone, his mouth loose and tremulous from emotion.

"Do you believe there is any hope of his gaining the ship?" asked Murray.

"Hope!" groaned Amos. "Hope! Good God! There ain't no hope of nothin'!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he's dead. I see him fall just as he came in reach of th' ship," and with

a shudder he sank to the ground and covered his face with his trembling hands.

"Are you sure?" I asked in horror.

"Aye, it's true. I have th' best of eyes, an' I see him whirlin' about in th' air as he lost his grip on th' rope an' plunged to his death."

Murray gave me one look of bitter anguish and turned his back, his head bowed in his hands. I knew that they both were thinking of Frank and his awful fate, because I was actually stunned by it myself, but in spite of this I could not help remembering what our fate was likely to be as I stared through scalding tears at the terrific cliff rising rampart upon rampart, height upon height, until it seemed to become a part of the blue sky itself. That towering, frowning battlement of eternal rock severed us from the rest of the world with all the sureness of death, and the realization of that fact was like a blow from a club.

With a shudder I turned from the contemplation of what I believed to be our prison walls and again sought the speck in the sky, which was all that remained to us of hope, and what I saw nearly choked me

with excitement. Unless I was mistaken, the Condor was returning.

"Am I going crazy!" I cried, clutching Murray by the arm. "Is my sight failing me or is the Condor coming this way?"

For the next two or three minutes we were under the suspense which, if disappointment follows, kills as sure as a bullet, but this did not last for long, as we soon knew there was no mistake. The Condor was under control and swiftly returning. There could be no explanation of this except that Frank had not fallen, but had succeeded in reaching the ship and was now at the helm.

Never in my life have I been in so exalted a state of relief and joy as when the Condor swept grandly down to where we could lay hands upon the still trailing rope. As for Frank, we found him sitting in the helmsman's seat arranging his valves and switches with the same cool precision as ever, but he was rather weak and shaky from the terrible strain of the climb up the rope. He said that he could have done it under normal conditions without a great deal of trouble, but hundreds of feet of open space beneath one in a feat of that kind are not conducive to steady nerves.

It seemed that after Murray and I left for the fishing Frank got the anchor lines off the Condor. One of the lines was somewhat twisted and snarled, and in order to straighten it out ready to coil he fastened one end to a ring just inside the door. He had the line untangled and was about to coil it when the cries of the monsters reached his ears, and without a thought of anything happening to the Condor he ran towards the shore.

He saw the monsters before he got within speaking distance of us and also saw that we were in no danger. As he stood at the top of the rise watching the fighting brutes he happened to look towards the Condor, and was horrified to see that it was slowly rising into the air. He remembered the rope, realized that it was by this he must reach the ship, if at all, and ran as he never had run before. But he did not remember that he called to us.

"What became of the monsters?" asked Frank, after we had heard his account of the runaway.

"I don't know," replied Murray, "and there is one thing of which you have not told us. Amos said that he saw you fall

from the rope just as you came within reach of the ship. I never knew him to be mistaken in his eyesight before. What was it he saw?"

"It was one of the natives," replied Frank in a low voice, "and I rather think it was the one who did the mischief in the first place by moving the gas-lever. It was at half power when I reached it. There were seven of the little men in the ship up there with me and they were the worst frightened lot of monkeys you ever saw. The fellow that fell was the worst, and I guess he knew that he was to blame. He was trying to pull me up by the rope when he slipped from the doorway, lost his hold on the line and shot by me with a screech that I'm afraid I shall hear for some while. Luckily he didn't strike against me, as I was so nearly tuckered by then that a small jolt would have knocked me off the rope like a ripe apple falling from a twig."

"I knew that somebody fell," said Amos, "an', of course, I thought 'twas you. He was so far off that all I knew was that it was a man, although he didn't look bigger th'n a fly."

"We were pretty high up," said Frank. "I



know that, because it happened just before I reached the ship. I wasn't over two feet from the door when he piled out."

"Well," said Murray, "that climb was the grandest feat I ever witnessed, but I never want to see anything of the kind again, and now, as there is nothing to keep us here longer, let's head the Condor for home."

"Where are your fish?" asked Frank with a grin.

"Down there on the lake shore, but let them stay there. We don't need them."

"No," said I, "we will get the fish and see if the fight is over. Come on," and we started for the lake.

We found the fish, but, although we examined the lake carefully, we saw nothing of the monsters.

"Now for the good old United States," said Murray as we returned to what had become a treasure ship, and as she rose swiftly from the bottom of the great pit we waved a farewell to the wondering natives, whom we left in jabbering excitement.

For as long as the mighty crater remained in view I sat by the window and stared down into its wonderful depths. We had not explored one-tenth of its extent and yet

we had found many strange things, passed through some rather odd adventures, and obtained enough wealth to satisfy us all.

It seemed as though this was enough, but as the Condor glided above the crest of what I believe to be the most frightful cliff upon this earth and the pit passed from my sight I found that in the back of my mind I was harboring an idea that sometime I should return.

It seemed to me that the time was coming when I should learn more of the strange things which I believed to be hidden in the dark recesses of the jungle-like forest, discover where the outlet of the lake was and what it might lead to, and where the little people came from and when. I wanted to learn their language, so that I could listen to their tales of long ago; their folk-lore and legends of past ages; their religious belief, if they had any, and the traditions of any other country or people, if there was such among them.

"I should like," said I, speaking aloud half unconsciously, "to know where those monsters came from and how long they have been there."

**“There is no doubt of that,” said Frank, “and there are lots of other things left back there which I should like to know.”**

**There is no use talking, Frank is a kindred spirit.**

## CHAPTER XV.

Straight into the northeast we flew until at last we again looked down into the great eastern plains of South America, and with glad hearts we left the wild and frightful desolation of the inhospitable Andes behind as we rushed swiftly down to meet the balmy breezes of the green world below.

Our voyage home was uneventful, that is, if it can be said that a voyage of 4,000 miles through the air is uneventful, and from the time we started the engine at the bottom of the pit until we circled to a gentle landing in the field back of the laboratory nothing bothered or gave us a moment of trouble.

It was at about the hour of one in the morning that we landed, and to give Frank's parents a gentle hint that we had arrived, he turned the searchlight full upon the windows of that peaceful house just before we reached the ground, and so quickly did the hint take effect that both his father and mother rushed from the door to receive us before we even left the ship.

To be sure, they had not delayed their welcome by paying too much attention to

the simple question of dress, for although it was late October the night was warm and still. Mrs. Byrd, I remember, was wrapped in a bed-blanket, while her good husband had taken the time to put on his trousers, but as he came into the light I saw that he had donned them so hurriedly that he had the seat in front.

"Did you run all the way out here backwards?" asked Frank, with a grin, as he grasped his father by the hand.

"Backwards! What do you mean by backwards?"

"He's that way only from the waist down to his feet," said Amos, with a chuckle.

Mr. Byrd looked down at himself, but as he realized the mistake he had made in dressing, his face remained unchanged.

"Oh! You mean my trousers. Well, you see, I set around so much nowadays that I have taken to wearing them that way so as not to wear out the seat."

"No wonder th' kid's got a nerve," said Amos in my ear.

Mrs. Byrd retired to her chamber to exchange her blanket for a wrapper, but her husband refused to make any change in his

attire until we had given him some account of our trip.

"You went after diamonds," said he, with a glance at the bags we had brought into the house after the Condor had been placed in the structure where it had been built.

"Yes."

"Well, did you find any?"

"What do you suppose?" asked Frank.

"I don't suppose you did."

"Well, here is a sample of what we brought back," and with that he pulled open one of the bags and turned a double handful of the stones on the table.

"Do you mean to say that those things are diamonds?" asked his father, holding one to the light.

"Yes, those are diamonds."

"I'll bet four dollars you're mistaken. They ain't nothing but glass."

In spite of all Murray and I could say he held to his opinion until after we had made a trip to New York and had disposed of about one-tenth of the stones, but when he realized the sum that one-tenth had brought us he was nearly stunned. We did not dare throw the entire lot upon the market at one time, and even as it was we had a good deal

of trouble in convincing the brokers that the stones were ours beyond claim. I think we should not have succeeded so well as we did if it had not been for the fact that Murray was not unknown to them.

My story is done and yet the strange voyage is but a few months over. I have written these pages sitting in a room from which I can see the great barnlike structure which houses the Condor from prying eyes. We have made no certain plans for the future, but both Murray and Frank as well as Amos are clamoring for another voyage, and I believe it will come to that in the end.

We have talked of both the South and North Poles, but it is not there that the Condor will cast her shadow. My idea is, with the almost unlimited means now at our command, to build a new Condor upon much greater lines and of far greater power. With such a ship as that, in which it would be possible to carry supplies to last for many months, it would be easy to visit the many spots upon this globe which are still comparatively unknown.

This is something which I have always wanted to do, but until now I could see no way of gratifying that desire. The Condor

has changed all that, and if I retain my health I intend to know whether there are stranger things in the world than we found in the Pit of the Andes.

As I think of the possibilities of that pit I always begin dreaming day dreams, in which I find myself longing to again gaze at that frightful cliff with the waters of the mysterious lake lying dark and still in its mighty shadow, and when I dream such dreams as that there comes to my remembrance the eager, blood-chilling whine of the strange monsters, thereby rousing a strong desire to know the answer to the many strange things we were unable to fathom while there.

Even as I pen these last few lines I find myself wondering if the outlet of the lake leads under the cliff, and, if so, what else is there in there, and where would that stream of water lead to? Is there any connection between such a possible world under that frightful cliff and the presence in the pit of those gigantic, tripod-like beasts?



# **Excavating a Husband**

by

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